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by
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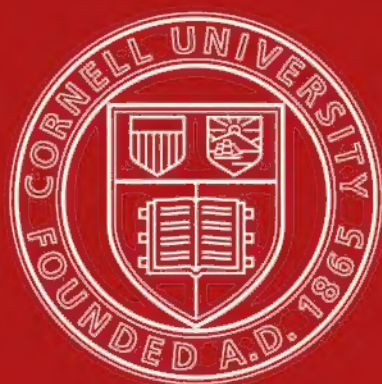
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A Deliverance

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A Deliverance

BY

ALLAN MONKHOUSE

*"He may entreat, aspire,
He may despair, and she has never heed.
She drinking his warm sweat will soothe his need,
Not his desire."*

EARTH AND MAN.

JOHN LANE, THE BODLEY HEAD
LONDON AND NEW YORK

1898

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A DELIVERANCE

I

URSULA

URSULA HARLAND was the only child of a Manchester yarn agent, and had spent her childhood in a suburb of the city. Her mother died when she was a baby, and the father, who looked upon women as inferior beings, incapable of "business," left her very much to herself. His affection took the forms of exaction and protestation, rarely or never of sympathetic vision. After a succession of ill-chosen governesses, his narrowing income and the girls's own preferences induced him to consent to her attending a public High School, where she obtained a sound general education and made some friends.

Her home life was relieved from barrenness by her books and her meditations. Through many by-ways of sentiment and affectation she

progressed towards some knowledge and love of beauty. Her circumstances had early developed self-reliance, and a wayward temper was perhaps the precursor of an original mind. A lonely childhood is a pitiful thing, yet in after years Ursula looked back on that period with a kindly wistfulness; with something of affection, with a touch of envy for the remote, brave, hopeful girl to whom life appeared overflowing with interest and romance. The ideal world in which she lived had poets for its heroes, and not always the best of poets. It was a nebulous world, sadly wanting in the warmth of human fellowship, but it saved her from dependence on the coarse comforts and trivial concerns by which the imaginations of girls of her class are so often smothered. There are large sections of English society in which the children find their best chances for a spiritual life in the neglect or cruelty of their parents.

Mr. Harland's business had declined for some years, and depression and anxiety, coupled with habits of intemperance, hastened his death. Ursula found herself, at eighteen, alone in the world. Her income, small, but sufficient for simple needs, was controlled by a trustee, an old

friend of her family. Mr. Broxap was a kindly and accommodating old gentleman, and made little difficulty with regard to the projects of travel on which she had set her mind. She was, in the first instance, attached to an English family and, by all reports, efficiently chaperoned, but, as a matter of fact, she soon assumed the control of her own movements. The easy-going Mrs. Fletcher satisfied her conscience with an enumeration of Ursula's qualities; her self-reliance, her discretion, her perspicacity. Indeed she declared that they had much more need of Ursula's protection than she of theirs, and, on her return to England, ridiculed Mr. Broxap's faint protests, assuring him, it is to be feared on no stronger authority than Ursula's own, that no woman's education could possibly be considered complete without six months in the peculiarly stimulating atmosphere of the Latin Quarter.

Mr. Broxap had his misgivings, but a certain delicacy of respect for his ward kept him from active interference. He contented himself with writing some rather vague exhortations, conscious as he was that advice, to be fruitful, should bear more definite relations to knowledge

than his could assume. He obtained the most proper and reassuring replies, and was startled all the more when he received from Ursula, at Paris, a telegram requiring his immediate presence there. To an elderly gentleman whose habits are the ripe fruit of a well-spent life, such a summons is a serious matter, and the hurried journey, the bad crossing, and all the harassments of arrival hardly fitted him for the business on hand. For he was met with an immediate and impetuous demand from Ursula for money—for large sums of money—for a considerable portion of her fortune.

Bewilderment contended with indignation, and there crossed his mind a faint regret that he was a gentleman, or at least that he was a gentleman of his particular kind, for really he could almost have enjoyed giving this young person a sound rating. He was confronted with an impecunious young French painter—a genius he was assured—whose desperate plight had roused Ursula to this preposterous action.

“I have sent for you,” she said, “because I know I can depend on you to do what is right, and the appeal I make to you is only possible here. I know that in England, in cold blood,

you couldn't listen to me; to bring you here will convince you how much I am in earnest."

Mr. Broxap was a man of humour, and this appealed to him. She continued:—"This is a great man, his possibilities are boundless, he will found a school, initiate a movement,—this is the chance of our lives; all he requires is freedom, scope. You don't know much of art, but you are a man of liberal and enlightened views." Mr. Broxap bowed. "Ask anyone who knows." She paused and he said: "I wonder if we could get the art critic of the *Times* over?"

"You don't take me seriously," she said quietly.

"My dear, you achieve serious results, but as for your project, do you know what it means?"

"It means this," she said, "that I want my money—some of it, enough to make him independent, to give him a chance; he's painting mere pot-boilers—even those he can't sell, and he's in debt—there's no sort of outlook for him. All the students in Paris—the clever ones—look to him, but they're all as poor as he is; he hasn't caught on yet, and no one ever buys his real work."

“Does one come to Paris to acquire American slang?” said Mr. Broxap severely.

He submitted to a strenuous but quite fruitless attempt to put him into right relations with modern French art. Ursula found herself working on virgin ground and volunteered a hasty sketch of the history of painting. She found herself receding further and further from her immediate object. They failed to find common ground in a definition of art.

“I’m a dull old man,” he said.

“No,” she said, reflecting, and added, “Do I seem to you a reasonable, intelligent person?”

“Rather a clever young lady.”

She looked at him doubtfully and said:—
“What right have you to keep my money? You can’t judge in this case; I am better qualified, you acknowledge that. Your legal control is only an accident; you will not insist on it as a right.”

But he remained inflexible, finding a certain pleasure in his own firmness, conscious though he was that the alternative was sheer lunacy. He reasoned with her, and she was good enough to say that she respected his scruples, while implying that he had failed to reach an ideal.

However, he bought one or two of the man's pictures, rejecting the pot-boilers regretfully in favour of the curious works of genius. His good humour was rewarded with several very pleasant days in Paris, and he obtained some glimpses of the life of the Latin Quarter foreign to the experience of the majority of staid English visitors. It speaks for his liberal confidence in his ward that he made no demand for her immediate return to England, satisfying himself with the knowledge that she had what he called some decent people for friends and companions.

The day before his proposed return, Ursula asked him for a small sum of money, her allowance being some weeks less than due. He mentioned a condition—that none of this advance should go to the needy genius. After consideration she declined to accept the condition, but ultimately made what she described as a “sporting offer” to go back to England with him if he would buy yet another picture. He accepted the offer, but stoutly held out for a pot boiler, groaning in anticipation of his wife's reception of those other surprising additions to their home decorations. Ursula recognised his trust in her in his not stipulating for any promise as to

her future movements. They travelled home together very pleasantly, and she paid him a long visit, glad of the sweet humdrum English life after the strain and ferment of Paris.

She corresponded with the Frenchman for some time, and Mr. Broxap noticed, with some vexation, that she maintained an extreme economy in her personal expenses. It was long after that she confessed to him that her expectations were disappointed, and she even shrugged her shoulders over the pictures he had bought in Paris.

"But you told me to buy them," he said.

"Ah, well," she answered, "it's a test to live with them, and besides, I'm not standing still."

So no more was heard of the chance of their lives.

For the next two or three years Ursula ranged through Italy and France, sometimes alone, sometimes with casual companions. Like most clever girls brought up in provincial towns, her ideals were literary; and even during her stay in Paris, where she had drawn for some months at a studio, she had carefully defined the limits of this particular training. Her ambitions were, perhaps, less crude than those of some

young literary aspirants. Her impulses became subjected to that great qualification—at once purifying and enriching—a constant familiarity with great works of art. Upon these her intelligence and her sympathies fastened, till she presented the unusual example of a youthful enthusiasm for criticism, the eager desire for assimilation and comprehension, for that ordered sympathy which is of the best that life can give.

A visit to an old schoolfellow at Manchester led to her introduction to a sub-editor and leader writer on a principal Manchester paper. Through him she obtained some slight review work, to which she applied herself with strenuous care. Her work was approved, although she was pained sometimes to find her elaborate searchings subdued by the editorial touch to the casual omniscience of the profession. Meanwhile she took rooms temporarily in Manchester, and after a succession of experimental excursions, she thought herself lucky to secure a cottage at Darley, that most picturesque of Manchester environs. When this narrative opens she had occupied it for about four years, and was nearly twenty-five years old. If she had few friends in Darley, she was at least friendly with most, and she believed in her own

capacity for friendship, perhaps for something more.

In her travels abroad she had met many clever and interesting women, and had been intimate with some who had a serious hold upon life and an insight into it. It seemed strange to her at first to find the ladies of this suburban village, with opportunities of wealth and leisure, content with what seemed to her so meagre a life. For many of them she had a genuine liking, a genuine respect. She did not thank God that she was not as those other women were, but sometimes she wished that their eyes might be opened a little wider. Her superiority was so far founded on the due reverence for what was above her—was indeed so relative—that she had no difficulty in maintaining a befitting humility, in striking a note void of offence. Perhaps she permitted herself a touch of irony, for the fine shades of irony, little more than personal reservations, are hard to resist. It amused her to observe the *naïveté* of their attitude towards art, their idea of it as something extraneous and unnecessary, an elegance, an expensive ornament, a branch of decoration. She had no inclination to proselytise among her own class; and an attempt

which she made upon the village people failed from her inflexible determination to exclude the mercenary taint. She declined to recognise any impulsion towards the practice of such art as she endeavoured to teach other than an ideal one, and refused offers of assistance from well-meaning friends, who proposed to make her classes useful and educational. She rejected all compromise, and saw the classes dwindle to two or three young men, to whom, on the final severance of formal relations, she became something of a guide and friend. They had gained an idea, and henceforth they too belonged to the band of visionaries.

Nevertheless, her vagaries took somehow the shape of a practical understanding. The fervours of sentiment were not hers, and she was sometimes pronounced to be unimaginative and materialistic. Actually, it seemed that this world was good enough for her, but she went deeper into it than some of the aspirants to a better.

II

AN ENVIRONMENT

DARLEY is a Cheshire village with most of the characteristics of Derbyshire, upon which it borders. It is traversed by two roads, which cut one another almost at right angles in the heart of the village; the old road between Manchester and the South, which descends abruptly to debouch upon the open space fronting the "Boar," and rises again steeply through Higher Darley; and the newer, duller, commoner, more convenient highway which runs its course on the valley levels. Darley, in these latter days, has become a suburb of Manchester, from which it is distant a dozen or more miles. Red brick villas, at the best unsuited to the country, are fast converting beautiful places into eligible sites, and the march of civilisation is only delayed by a defective train service.

Great is the power of the railway company.

If they run a sufficient number of trains to a wilderness or a swamp, the city man will cheerfully follow their suggestion. Beauty, healthiness, interests are good, but what is the train service? The pioneers who made their way to Darley, submitting to ignominious shunting and changing for the sake of a place unspoilt, scarcely preyed upon by the builder, clamoured for more trains, and got them, to their loss. But Darley has the perennial beauty and variety of distant hills. Perhaps its most characteristic aspect is seen on a clear sunless autumn day—a landscape of cold intentness, of grey stone hamlets, high undulating horizon, peaceful slopes, long harmonious lines. But the glories of sun and mist bring the exuberance of common life that transcends the intimate and particular.

The newcomers to Darley were little troubled by curiosity about what was old and indigenous to the place. They assumed, so far as the matter occupied them, that they represented a higher standard of enlightenment and progress. They were the outcome of acute commercial competition, and did indeed represent a kind of accomplishment, a kind of success; if not an advance, at least a difference. In the English

middle class the point of honour of a military aristocracy, the note of revolt of the labourers, are misunderstood and scorned. Its own function should be to substitute a worthy commerce for a sordid commercialism, and it has not yet even realised the distinction. Its finest individuals are produced by some process of detachment which removes them from its influences.

Here, in Darley, Mr. Millington might stand as an epitome of a class. If he disturbs little the current of this narrative, he may have his uses as a background, a circumstance. At his best he was a thin reflex of the newspaper, for he read a morning and an evening paper, and at the end of the week he bought two illustrated periodicals and a society journal. These constituted his main literary provender, but occasionally he read a book that was in vogue; one of those of which Mr. Mudie circulates five hundred copies. A Liberal in politics, he condemned every new idea and every social movement, but he accepted them when they prevailed. It is impossible to conceive of any process of social growth that he would not condemn, or of any social disease that he would not accept. He took the liberal side in past controversies.

It was something of a misfortune to him that he had been born into the Liberal party, for he found himself pulled two ways—the desire to be on the gentlemanly side being counterbalanced by disinclination to change his morning paper, to which he was attached as much as such a man can be attached to anything. Besides, he placed great value upon consistency, lapses from which he was keen to detect. Fortunately the Home Rule split gave him an opportunity, and he became a Liberal Unionist. He did not change his paper, but he was compelled, with some derangement of the routine of his life, to make some effort to assimilate the *Conservative Daily* also; for it was a necessity of his position that he should be able to assert the current dogmas of his party. He held strong views on some social questions; he called them strong views, and he certainly gave them utterance in a voice of imperfect modulation. Sternly he discountenanced any tampering with the laws relating to marriage, or with those unwritten rules which help to preserve inviolate the innocence of young woman, her most marketable charm. Millington had led a “moral” life; that is to say, he had lacked courage or oppor-

tunity to transgress, though in some societies that he affected he would never have acknowledged this. The remarkable plainness of Mrs. Millington, a lady of some fortune, and quite well-connected, seemed to give him a touch of austerity. Nevertheless he was a man of the world, and in the smoke-room could be depended upon for the foulest version of the last foul story. He made an excellent churchwarden, and his immediate ambitions were to be a county magistrate, and to be asked to dine at the Hall. If his charities were somewhat ostentatious, it is fair to remember that the secret giver conveys nothing by example. A particular act of charity had no value to him, for charity was not an impulse, but a branch of statistics. Indeed with Millington, charity had less of humanity about it than tipping, for he could be genial with his inferiors if they did not presume upon his condescension. In short, Millington was a very decent fellow. He never had a friend, and to be his enemy was like hating an inanimate thing—a force in nature. Millington governed the world as surely as the world governed Millington. His personal appearance was not, of course, of much account, but he was considered a hand-

some and gentlemanly man. In the absence of Mrs. Hay Forwood, who struck a more forcible and, as he considered, a coarser note, he commonly led the conversation at Darley dinner parties.

As to Mrs. Forwood, she was frankly herself, and rather a loud and bustling self. She had forced her friendship upon Ursula, who liked and valued it. "Peggy," she called her, "not because you are in the least like a Peggy, but I want to push you just a little in that direction; Ursula keeps me at a distance, and there's no shortening it." She groaned at revelations of Ursula's "cleverness." "But don't build too much on it, my dear. I once went to a very select dinner in London; the kind of thing where they jerk out smart little things all round the table. My hostess had asked me by mistake, but never mind that. Well, I couldn't understand a bit; it was like Hunt the Slipper with me always in the middle. I had either to be mum or to assert myself, so I started talking—I can talk you know; don't laugh—and I believe it amused them a good deal more than their own little snippity sayings. 'After all,' one little man sighed out—I heard him—'to be

effective.' I was effective, I can tell you; and didn't my hostess look black? Afterwards, upstairs, this man came to me—a wizened little creature; he thought he could get some sport out of me. I didn't know what he meant, but I understood the people's faces. Never mind what I said to him; he went off pretty soon. You see a clever person is at a disadvantage with me. You can't afford to hold me in contempt."

"I regard you with terror and admiration."

"No you don't, but I tell you there's a kind of marking-time cleverness that you young people think too much about."

"But what's the use of progressing if you're in a nice place?"

"That's it—that's what I mean—that's how you cheat yourselves."

"And what do you advise—what do you want me to do?"

"I want you to make a friend of me, to overlook"—Mrs. Forwood had lost her fluency.

"I shall overlook nothing. I want you as you are."

III

A DINNER PARTY

WHEN there was a dinner party at Darley the carriage from the "Boar" had a busy time of it. It could not deposit everyone exactly at eight o'clock, and Jimmy the coachman was hard beset to get them all in by a decent quarter past. However, the circumstances of the case were well understood, and if Jimmy insisted on setting down his first fare ten minutes too early, explanations were frankly given and accepted. If the distance was not great, some of the ladies tucked up their skirts, put on overshoes, and marched boldly through the winter mud. Ursula was one of these when, on a fine night in mid winter, the roads beginning to stiffen with frost, she set out for Mr. Millington's. At his gate she stopped, reluctant to lose the exceeding beauty of the stars. Orion was brilliant, high in the heavens; following the line from Aldeboran

through the belt, she looked for Sirius through the trees that obscured the horizon ; it was one of her delights to watch his splendid steely glitter. Moving a few steps into the garden she found him, emerging from the mists, not yet at his brightest. Steps were heard approaching along the road.

She had not much inclination for the party, and lingered a little longer, unwilling to exchange the solemn exaltation of the night for what awaited her within the house. This great impression—at once of power and peace—was more than a mere antidote to what is trivial and garish in social life, but to her now it took colour from the light of her anticipations. She stared up at the Pleiades and began to count them—seven, eight—a childish triumph of clear sight. She felt almost light hearted again. After all the dinner might be amusing, though, being a sincere young woman, she wished frankly for some new and interesting men.

The footsteps were close at hand, and as she turned to go they stopped at the gate. Unwilling to reveal herself and ignorant of the identity of her fellow guest, she waited for him to pass into the house. But he, having closed

the gate, leaned over it in silent contemplation. She was in shadow and remained motionless, anxious to avoid the slight embarrassment of detection. She could not distinguish either his face or his figure. To lean over a gate and watch the stars when a dinner was in near prospect seemed an unlikely proceeding for any of the men whom she might have expected to meet. As she hesitated whether to stay or to withdraw, she was startled to hear him speak. The first words were audible but indistinguishable until the whole speech shaped itself:—

“Ay but—to die, and go we know not where;
To lie in cold obstruction, and to rot.”

The lines were delicately spoken, beginning with a cadence exquisitely querulous, and falling to the levels of acquiescence and despair. Ursula was full of wonder, interested and curious, even agitated. She feared to play the eavesdropper, and was moving away quietly over the grass when she heard the gate open again, and, turning, saw him pass out. As she waited for admission to the house she saw him pace up and down before the gate. It was curious; it was almost comic. The faint light from the sky fell on his face upturned.

It is a good trait in a man to like his own fireside, and Millington constantly gravitated towards his hearthrug. There he enunciated his platitudes with an added conviction; there at least the social structure seemed firm. When Ursula entered the drawing-room she found him happily posed in his familiar attitude, and as she spoke with Mrs. Millington she overheard some words of his conversation.

“Searle—S e a r l e—yes, taken rooms at the “Boar”—very well connected—Surrey I think,—all dead—and his only sister within a week—some little time ago—sad, oh! very sad—clever man—I believe literary and that sort of thing—solicitor—yes.”

Mr. Searle entered the room with self-possession, and showed no sign of having recently communed with the stars. He seemed about thirty; to Ursula’s trained eye he was handsome; his expression was gracious and frank—frank yet with a certain reticence, an unknown quantity, a personal reservation. He moved with the gentle precision of a man accustomed to society.

Mrs. Hay Forwood had already met him, and now rapidly improved the acquaintance: “Now

Mr. Searle, you mustn't expect too much from us. Darley is an out-of-the-way, poky little place, but we have our feelings; don't be too superior."

"My dear Madam, I'm not superior. I'm a most ordinary person."

"Oh! we don't want that. I like a man with a little devil in him; don't you, Peggy?"

"Perhaps it's more interesting with the devil somewhere about," said Miss Harland.

Mr. Searle looked at her: "Don't you think good people are more interesting than bad ones?"

"Are safe people more interesting than those in danger?"

"If safety gives the opportunity for a natural expression."

"Oh! this is capital," cried Mrs. Forwood
"I see you're an acquisition."

"A conquest," said Searle, bowing.

"Well, you must really take Miss Harland in. Where's Mr. Millington? Miss Harland is our show young lady, and we must try to make the best impression possible."

Mrs. Forwood succeeded in provoking a misunderstanding, and Searle found himself hesitating whether to offer his arm to Miss Harland or to a Mrs. Brayshaw, to whom he had been intro-

duced. It was no assistance to him to receive an audible assurance from the departing Mrs. Forwood that Miss Harland was their "bright particular star."

"One can but be blinded," he said, looking toward Mrs. Brayshaw deprecatingly.

"Miss Harland will make you open your eyes," said that lady, taking the arm of another hesitating gentleman.

Seated at the table, he congratulated himself on the accident that had put him in Mr. Grafton's place—Mr. Grafton's name was on the card opposite to him—yet, catching Mrs. Brayshaw's eye, and glancing at Mr. Grafton, he had his compunctions, even regrets. He turned to Miss Harland:—

"Does Mrs. Forwood often say awkward things?"

"She says so many things, that some of them must be awkward."

"A nice woman, nevertheless?"

"She is my greatest friend in Darley." It gave him food for reflection. Mrs. Forwood seemed hardly the ideal friend for a woman of Miss Harland's quality; yet, as he reflected, the more intimate appreciations penetrate beneath the

superficial affinity that makes common friends. Nevertheless the avowal of particular friendship for the good-natured lady struck him with a sense of isolation.

He was not a man of quick observation, and as he glanced at her profile he tried to gather his recollections of her face. Her beauty—already he thought of her as beautiful—seemed to him to have a pathetic quality, not of weakness or insufficiency, but of endeavour, of tension, of a personal dignity, pathetic to him in his state of brooding dulness which he took for disillusion. With a vague sympathy there came a revival of old feelings, a taste of the old interests and excitements, of the world of man and woman. When his mind slipped back again into the familiar groove of memories and regrets, he was conscious of a change.

At Miss Harland's prompting, he realised that Mr. Millington was addressing him, and to the twice-repeated enquiry whether he was comfortable at the "Boar," he replied in the affirmative, adding that the trippers were sometimes rather noisy on Saturdays and Sundays.

"Hateful people," said Mrs. Brayshaw, "why can't they be exterminated?"

"Don't whisper a word of it," said Miss Harland, "they are much more likely to exterminate us."

"Us? I thought you professed to belong to the democratic party."

"Merely an instinct of self-preservation."

Someone asked whether Miss Harland was to be exterminated.

"Oh! Miss Harland is quite irrepressible," said Mrs. Brayshaw pleasantly.

"You can't even hurt me," said Ursula.

The trippers were roundly condemned on all hands.

"After all," said Searle, "people have a good deal of the unexpected about them. I saw not long ago a very mouldy street-corner kind of man, and came very near to despising him. Imagine my confusion when I heard that he was the champion of the world."

"What at?"

"Carrying a brick."

"What nonsense is this?" cried Mrs. Forwood, "anyone could carry a brick."

"This idol of democracy carried it between his finger and thumb."

"Ha! well—" said Mr. Millington, "in the

domain of athletics records are constantly beaten. No doubt someone has out-distanced your friend by this time. The athlete is never really great, for no athlete is unique." He was really quoting from a recent article in his weekly paper.

"W. G. Grace is unique," said Searle. "We shall as soon have another Shakespeare as a repetition of him. I defy you to frame a definition of greatness that will exclude him."

The challenge was not taken up, and the conversation again became particular.

"You know the theory," said Ursula, "that genius is a form of mental dislocation?"

"Yes, it's ingenious; yet I suppose it is not the well-balanced men who have moved the world."

"The movement is perhaps less difficult than the control."

"True," he said, "but whether in control or movement, the admirable Crichtons have had small share."

"Yes, we women are finding that out. A few years ago, a decent all-round education seemed an end worth achieving. Now we all want to be specialists."

"And you want to move the world?"—he

approached the great subject lightly—"what about your influence over us—through us? I am indicating the conventional view; you regenerate the world, you save the world, through us."

"Is that your view?"

"Will you pin me down to an opinion? Not quite that, but take it that I hold it."

"If you simply vote as we tell you, we might as well do it at first hand."

"I assume the influence to be general, instinctive, not a result of detailed knowledge."

"Apparently, then, we save the world through lack of knowledge of it; or it's an accident of instinct, like the geese saving Rome. It seems unlikely."

Mr. Millington's voice was heard denouncing the "new fiction"—"Heroines who make open advances." His wide open eyes encountered Searle's, who said: "It's the covert advances that would frighten me."

"This dreadful knowingness!" came from a lady opposite to Searle, who said, not without the consciousness of Miss Harland's approval:

"Yes, we can't keep you ignorant, but we do invite you to cultivate the art of ignoring."

Mr. Millington was innocent of the perception of irony, and said with concurrence: "These refinements, these delicacies, are where women excel."

It was a gracious speech, uttered in his best manner, with a vague inclination in the nature of a bow. Miss Harland's voice sounded a little hard:

"A healthy woman cannot live on delicacies."

"Ah! Miss Harland, I am sure that you appreciate the necessity of keeping inviolate the sanctities of life."

Ursula smilingly withdrew from the general conversation, which was turned by Mr. Millington to subjects less abstruse.

Searle turned to her with laughter in his eyes:

"The sanctities of life?" he said.

"He means the sanctities of the smoke room?"

"What do you know of the smoke room?"

"A woman's knowledge is largely inference. Women approach some subjects in a different spirit from men—most men. Their associations with them are not the nod and wink and the stifled laugh."

"You claim power as well as knowledge?"

"Surely they should bear some relation to one another."

"One does not often meet women who can help."

The speech seemed almost a considered rudeness, and Ursula glanced at him in surprise; but he had spoken ruminatingly, and she decided that she liked the frankness of it. She said:

"At least you should prepare us for emergencies. Soon or late they come to all."

"Emergencies!"

"I suppose there is no pose that man enjoys so much as that of the strong and ready."

"We shall abandon it reluctantly, no doubt."

"And what a lot of fine sentiment will become antiquated."

"You believe in an equality of the sexes?"

"I acknowledge differences."

"At least the possibility of an equal friendship?"

Only a sideways meeting of the eyes was possible to them. It seemed to Ursula that they had taken a sudden step towards intimacy. She answered: "The balance can always be redressed by our devotion."

It struck him that her irony had the colour

of truth. Decidedly there was something that touched him in the strong, aspiring woman. The thought, not unfamiliar to him, recurred, that the fulness of strength and life has more of pathos than their failure and abandonment.

IV

A TEA PARTY

FOR some time Ursula saw little of Searle. He seemed to avoid the parties with which the Darley people combated the long dull winter. He was considered to be eccentric, and was certainly pre-occupied. Once he called at the house of an acquaintance in response to a general invitation to come in and smoke a cigar any evening. The occasion was unfortunate, for a dinner party was in progress, an invitation to which he had previously declined. The story got about, was distorted into a deliberate affront, magnified into habits of discourtesy, contradicted, disbelieved, half believed, misunderstood, leaving an impression. He was thought to be "sarcastic," and, as he was not an habitual boaster, "conceited." Nevertheless the Darley ladies were grateful for a subject, and in their hearts were touched by his isolation, by what in

their expansive moments they called his air of romance, even by the crude fact that he was an eligible bachelor. Mrs. Webster entertained a select party with curious details of his proceedings at the "Boar." Her housemaid had a friend in service there, and fresh instances of Mr. Searle's peculiarities were constantly forthcoming. On one occasion he had had in to dinner John Bateson, a carpenter in the village, a man notorious for his free tongue, a Socialist, and it was believed, an Atheist; and he had given directions for a good dinner too, with claret and port—not champagne—and, indeed, John took beer. "But think of my waiting on John Bateson, just as if he was a gentleman," said Eliza.

Sometimes he did not touch his own dinner for half an hour after it was ready, and it growing cold, but sat in his chair staring "hard-like" before him. He rarely dined out or had anyone in, yet his hours were irregular. He would say he was going out for a walk before dinner, and be away for hours. Eliza acknowledged that he was a real gentleman, and felt a bit sorry for him, though sometimes he was impatient with her, and had asked her pardon afterwards.

Mrs. Webster did not, of course, encourage this news, "but servants will talk, you know."

"Well," said Mrs. Hay Forwood, "if there is nothing more against him than all this—"

"Ah! but what a temper he must have," struck in Miss Pope. "Did you hear about his smashing the golf clubs?"

The ladies had not heard, and craned with attention. Ursula, who was present, frowned, but listened.

"Well, my brother heard it from the caddie yesterday. Mr. Searle's only a beginner, you know, and he couldn't get over the wall at the fifth hole; so he went up and broke his club over it. Then he said something about a tiger tasting blood, and broke another, and then another, saying: 'This is no game for me.' When there was only one club left, the boy said: 'Please sir, may I have it?' and he said: 'Why didn't you speak sooner, my boy; it's only the putter:' but he gave it to him, and all the balls he had in his pocket. He seems to have been pretty cool over it; but isn't it childish?"

"What a lack of self-control," said Mrs. Webster.

“It was not altogether absent,” said Ursula.

Mrs. Brayshaw had listened with a smile, and glanced now at Ursula:—“I think it delightful of him,” she said, “and so sensible. What do they find in that golf? I was up there the other day, and saw two men coming in; they seemed weary and dejected to the last degree; but such was their infatuation, that they were starting for another round, and they glared at me like wild beasts because I walked across their line of fire. I stopped to look at the landscape, and I could hear their cursings. And such a curious ambition—to go round in 80 or to be 5 up—to attain precision—there’s an ideal! It’s as bad as always having to do what’s right. At golf there’s no pleasure in doing wrong; it’s a moral exercise; you try to become a machine.”

“But what a splendid thing to be a conscious steam-engine,” said Ursula.

“I should always be wanting to blow up.”

Mrs. Webster brought them back to facts—
“He sends his washing to Mrs. Bennett now.”

“Indeed,” said Miss Pope with interest, “I thought it was Mrs. Armstrong.”

“It was, but he found young Armstrong wore his things. Jane says he met him and recognised

a coloured shirt. He made him take it off there on the road, and carried it home over his arm."

"But that was not right," said Miss Burford, "it was not respectable."

"I am sure Miss Harland despises us for all this gossip," said Mrs. Webster.

"But why not gossip?" cried Mrs. Brayshaw—"the proper study of womankind is man."

"It all depends on the quality and the temper," said Ursula.

"You are twice blessed—you listen and you condemn us."

"Then I condemn myself too, for I'm quite interested."

She was more interested than she realised. The foolish irritation over the golf clubs made less impression upon her than the saving kindness to the boy, which was perhaps, in reality, little more than the affectation by which a madman convinces himself of his exceeding sanity. She liked him none the less because he was evidently not impeccable—certainly it increased her curiosity.

She left with Mrs. Brayshaw, who said: "As things go in this dead-alive place, this man

promises to be interesting. Have you seen anything of him?"

"Not since"—

"Since you cut me out? Well, he's the kind of man that one of us might marry."

Ursula frowned and turned away: "I dislike these rashnesses of speech," she said.

"I know—it's very wrong of me. You provoke me to it. Humdrum and rashness; there's my life. The rashness is to come. You, on the contrary, are as safe as the Bank."

"There comes a run on the Bank."

"Oh! you'll come out all right."

"How easy it is to acknowledge the virtues which one despises."

"My dear girl, they're my chief envy."

"Assume them, then."

"I am as God made me."

"He leaves room for a few finishing touches."

"Oh, well. I hate straight lines."

"Art—art should be your vocation—put morals aside."

"Is that your advice?"

"If you want me to speak seriously—I think that you are capable of a high standard of taste."

"Thanks."

V

A WALK ON THE HILLS

It was April by the almanac, but March ruled the elements. Searle, escaping from his rooms, strode fast up the old Buxton road. He left Darley behind, and had almost cleared the hamlet of Higher Darley, when he saw, without marking, a woman on the road before him. As he passed she turned, revealing Miss Harland, and he acknowledged her bow. When he was twenty yards ahead she saw him stop suddenly. He came back to her: "May I walk a little way with you?"

She smiled assent, and they went on together. Presently she said: "What a splendid day." It was raining in gusts, blowing hard and cold; the blue sky came and went.

"It is far enough from the conventional splendid day."

"Oh, if you prefer conventions—"

“They sometimes shield us from bare realities.”

“But this a reality—this is life. Mists and doubts are blown away; this, at least, is ours. Out here we are not mere commentators on life; we have a part in it.”

“To me this is only a wild day.” He said it with the doggedness of one who accentuates a half truth, knowing it to be half a lie.

“I’m afraid your case is a bad one.”

He was startled at the readiness with which she accepted what was, in truth, a confidence. He was by habit reticent, and yesterday it would have seemed incredible to him that he should speak freely to a woman who was almost a stranger.

But to-day, on these bare heights, life seemed to him, too, simplified and elemental. Intimacies outrun the slow progress of time, and an urgent impulse possessed him, a craving for sympathy, long repressed, a desire to escape from the dull and maddening monotony of his thoughts, at least to qualify them with another’s comments.

It is rare to find the sympathy of a woman united with the reticence that makes a confidence possible. He knew this, and told himself that this woman was an exception.

“It’s a singular thing that I should wish to talk about myself. I pay you the compliment of giving myself away completely. Do you ever have black fits? To-day I’m suicidal, homicidal. I’ve not spoken an intimate word to anyone for months, and I’m sick of myself. I’m thankful that I turned back, that I’m not on ahead alone. Don’t pity me. It’s castigation that I want.”

She was moved by the simplicity of his appeal, repressing the easy gush of pity which, in the reality of his need, he dreaded.

“With health of body and the earth at hand things come right,” she said.

He quoted: “‘This goodly frame the earth seems to me a sterile promontory.’”

“Then there is art—‘for dulness, our modern malady, Art is the specific.’ I quote from one just a little lower than Shakespeare; and confess that that phrase ‘sterile promontory’ thrills you.”

“No—not thrills; but it is wonderfully exact.”

“You have his sympathy then; but how un-Shakespearean to rest on the sterile promontory.”

Presently he said, “There’s something for everybody in Shakespeare. I remember an old toper who was delighted with Falstaff’s ‘I would

I might never spit white again.' Perhaps you don't like Falstaff? "

"That's a test question, I suppose." She was pleased even at this slight diversion.

They had reached the highest part of the road, which stretched before them for a few hundred yards before descending to the lower levels. On the right an unkempt plantation of firs obscured the hill side. A stone wall, bordering the left side of the road, separated them from the slopes that ran down to the nearest valley. Searle's eye picked out a shapen stone let into the wall: "What's this?"

They stopped before it. "The Murder Stone."

They read the inscription. "Why perpetuate such an ugly thing? What do you know of it? How was it done?"

"I have never heard a full version. The man was followed for a long way—from Stockport I think. They set upon him here. As you see, it's a long time ago. It strikes one's imagination—the murderers (there were two of them I think) coming doggedly along, tired perhaps, footsore, thirsty."

"No, no; placid, patient, mechanical; waiting

for the time and place. My God ! It's an allegory of Death himself following."

"I prefer my realism," she said.

They stared together at the stone and, by a common impulse, looked round at the wood and back along the road. She moved on and he followed.

He said: "I have a great horror and a great terror of death."

"I suppose that underlies all our fortitudes."

"It gets the better of mine."

She looked at him with steady, questioning eyes.

"Since I was a child I have had this horror upon me—intermittent, frequently recurring. My father died of a lingering illness. He was partly paralysed—sat in a chair in a grey dressing gown. He wasted gradually away. He wished, I believe, to take part in the family life as long as possible, but he was sunk in gloom, and rarely spoke—not undignified. I watched him for hours, and I had thoughts that were not for a child. We were Church people—professedly at least—and when he died a great deal was told us about the soul and the kingdom of Heaven. I believed none of it, and I am sure that he did

not. Why! I'd seen him die. Have you seen the approach of death, the gradual breakdown of the body, the decay of the mind? With me it spoilt all this flimsy talk about the soul, and angels, and a happier life. I saw that they were described without conviction, and they were incredible in themselves. I was miserable for a long time, but I was glad that I was young and had many years before me. Then a playmate died, and it terrified me beyond measure. My sorrow for him was swallowed up in my own apprehensions. I thought every little stomach-ache a mortal disease, and I became abjectly cautious about everything. I was afraid to cross a road lest I should be run over. Do you think our tendencies are already developed at birth?"

"I think the first few years count for a great deal. The world should be regenerated by making children happy by habit. They should be happy and fantastic. It shouldn't be a concrete world to them."

"In short, they should begin life on a sound basis of delusions."

She nodded approval. "You have more to say."

“What do you think of a boy who was afraid to go to sleep lest he should die without awakening?”

“I’m sorry for him.”

“Perhaps it wasn’t altogether that. Sometimes I felt that I had nothing to look forward to on the morrow, and then I was snug and warm. But chiefly it was that mysterious hiatus. I used to rouse myself as I was dropping off to sleep. Did you never do that?”

“I often long for rest. I have faith in it, too.”

“Well, this mood didn’t last for ever, but it recurs. I suppose that many people would call me a materialist, but isn’t it rather absurd for a materialist to be the prey of apprehensions? Lately—you’ve heard perhaps—my mother—my sister—”

“I know.”

“Why do I tell you all this? I’m under a spell, like the Ancient Mariner. I suppose it’s unmanly and egoistic.”

The bursting of the dam of reticence threatened an uncontrollable flood of speech. She interrupted him: “You must fight against it, and endure till it passes.”

They turned out of the road, taking a pathway that climbed high on the hill-side.

“Yes,” he said, “that’s the right line to take. It’s not exactly sympathy I want.”

“You have my sympathy.”

“I know that.”

“I am honoured by your confidence.”

“You happen to be here.”

“Then anyone would have done as well?”

“No—no, I beg your pardon, I knew—I thought that you would be my best friend here. Now I’ve risked it, and let me assure you that such an outburst is not characteristic.”

“Is not habitual.” Her coolness braced him.

“You correct me.”

“You will not be offended if I say that I think there is something of egoism in your state of mind.”

“Well, what must I do?”

“You must resolutely pursue your most fruitful interests.”

“Good advice, no doubt, but a little vague—what are they?”

“I shall hope to find out, as I know you better.”

“I’m sure of one fruitful interest, then?”

She liked his wit and frankly gave him her eyes: "Yes, you must come and amuse me sometimes."

"Amuse you?" He looked doubtfully at her.

"I don't intend to let you weigh on my spirits. You are too serious to be taken quite seriously. Shall we go back by the Murder Stone and swear eternal friendship?"

His laugh had not quite the ring of conviction. She continued.

"We have had a serious conversation, but the key need not be maintained. I have good spirits naturally, and would rather be happy than not."

"I wouldn't see you again if I should make you unhappy."

For the remainder of the walk they talked mainly of what they saw. It seemed to Ursula that, until he was aroused, he was curiously unobservant, and that his temper improved as his faculties were exercised. He agreed willingly to her proposal that he should have tea with her.

As they reached the gate, Mrs. Brayshaw came down the hill, card-case in hand. "I must call at the Welbys," she said, when Ursula asked her to come in. "I shall be only a few minutes; I know they're out." Ursula divined an inter-

rogation in Searle's mind. "You want a diversion," she said. Indeed Mrs. Brayshaw enlivened him. She was easy, approachable, impenetrable. By any casual judgment she was handsomer than Ursula, and her talk had the effectiveness of a half cynical effrontery, melting, on occasion, to something more genial. In her presence, a man might try to surpass himself, but he would hardly be his best self.

They spoke of the walk, its direction, and the obvious characteristics.

"You went by the targets, then," she said.

"The targets?" said Searle, hesitating.

"What an interesting conversation it must have been."

"Yes," said Ursula, "about reflex action and the immortality of the soul."

"The Murder Stone as a provocative, no doubt. And what was the conclusion as to the soul?"

"That a mortal soul sufficed for such a day as this."

"Miss Harland is sadly heterodox, Mr. Searle. So are you, of course? Or do you hold with some fashionable reaction? A friend of mine in town assures me that Roman Catholics are

coming in again. I am orthodox. I am under the wing of the Vicar and Mr. Millington. So much more comfortable if they're right, you know; and if not, there's no harm done. I always feel so thankful to have escaped those mediæval times—to have to be so much in earnest, and to burn at the stake, and so on."

"There have been Laodiceans in every age," said Searle.

"Perhaps the Laodiceans are not such weak people, after all; they follow their own bent; they don't shout fervently with the crowd."

"Nor against it."

"What is intense in life is particular. It is not to be held in common. Preaching is for coarse people."

She verged on seriousness, and Searle was for the moment at a loss. Ursula intervened: "Art, art: I must insist on your becoming an artist. You will be quite disagreeable if you don't."

"But I can't paint or write, and I'm too lazy to learn."

"Well then, you'll have to 'work in life.'"

"For which your technique is already so admirable," said Searle.

"How delightful to have a man in Darley

who can make a pretty speech, isn't it, Ursula? You see, I am melted to the point of using your Christian name."

"Yes, but is it a friendly inspiration or part of the design?"

"The design?"

"Into which we are all to be worked."

"The best art is inspired, is it not?"

"The sources of inspiration are so many."

"You are a very clever girl, Ursula; too clever, I fear."

"I must try to rise to the occasion."

"I lie open to your instincts, and you think to get at me by your wits."

Ursula rose and approached her, regarding her with a whimsical scrutiny: "Have another cup of tea," she said, smiling broadly.

"Yes, I will, and a piece of this nice soft greasy muffin."

"Happily we return to materialism," said Searle.

"But see what lurks in the nature of the woman," said Ursula, "muffins oughtn't to be soft and greasy."

"Ah! but look at this one, my dear."

"The artist must idealise."

"He must keep his hold on the solids," holding out the muffin.

"All I can say in defence of Betsy is that this isn't a muffin country."

"This is considered a healthy village, Mr. Searle, and digestion is very much a matter of course."

"Are these home-made muffins?" said Searle.

"They are," replied Mrs. Brayshaw, "and they illustrate a great principle which Miss Harland will frequently explain to you at length. No bakers' muffins will do, nothing mechanical. William Morris and the middle ages, you know. The hand of the workman. You perceive Betsy's idiosyncrasy."

"Yes, I see that they are something to be remembered."

"Now this is nice of you both," said Ursula, "it is really friendly to grumble like this."

Mrs. Brayshaw rose, mentioning the necessity of another call. She shook hands with Ursula and looked at Searle. He said that he intended to stay till Miss Harland turned him out.

"How simple and unaffected we are getting now-a-days," said Mrs. Brayshaw. "I believe that people sometimes really do what they like

now. Miss Harland is rather a find isn't she? The worst of staying an abnormal time is that one goes at last because one is tired of it. Well, I must be off; though really I don't want to make this call, and care nothing if the people drop me. Why I go I can't imagine. It's a duty, I suppose—all disinclination and no virtue." She nodded to Searle and went out.

"One doesn't know whether to like her or not," said Ursula.

"She slips in something of what she means among the rest."

"Yes, she has not the virtue of precise speech, but she gives an impression."

"An attractive woman."

"Perhaps something of the attraction of danger."

"You are friendly with her?"

"We don't exactly quarrel, but we're not always amiable together. We give each other a certain value. Really there's something natural in our relations. She says cruel things sometimes, but I don't think she bears malice."

"Her husband?"

"It was a loveless marriage, I think." Her gentle speech seemed to reveal a nature pitiful

for others, proud for itself. His critical ear held the sad inflection of her voice, and it seemed to him to express something of an exquisite sensitiveness.

It struck him suddenly that she was tired, and he rose to go. They shook hands cordially. "Don't you keep a dog?" she said.

"No, I like dogs, but I don't shoot, or rat, or keep house, and I don't care for a dog as a superior toy. It doesn't seem respectful to the dog."

"As a companion?"

"Well, it hasn't come yet, and I can't go in cold blood to a dealer, to buy a companion. I suppose these are mere finical excuses; but you haven't a dog?"

"I had one but he died. The pity is that they die and one can outlast several generations of them. I don't like it. I shall get another when I'm sixty and then our chances will be more nearly equal."

"Sixty!—it's a long way off. I wonder whether I shall know you at sixty."

"Oh! yes, we shall be the cheery old friends of the optimistic novel."

"Sixty!—it's a great, weary way off. I can't do it; I can never do it."

“It excites me—the thought of all that life to come.”

“I can’t look so far ahead. I wish that the summer were here.”

“I don’t think you wish for the summer quite in the right way.”

“How?”

“You want it as a relief—a distraction.”

“Well?”

“You should love the summer for itself.”

VI

AN EVENING AT THE RED COTTAGE

SEARLE returned to his dinner with some appetite. The "diversion," as Miss Harland had called it, had stimulated him. As to the walk that had preceded it, with its strange confidences, he found it difficult to marshal his thoughts. Now that the black cloud had partly lifted from his spirits it seemed strange that he could ever have been impelled to such abandonment. Yet in his present relief, he recognised something of wisdom in the instinct that had precipitated him. He told himself that the avowal was no casual one, that he had fixed unerringly on the friend that could help him. He recalled her gravity of attention, the sympathy that braced rather than dissolved, and his rash impulse became a wise inspiration. In stress of spirit or of body a man may appeal to his friend. Her image, as the friend to whom such an appeal could be made,

became glorified to him. What might have seemed an unmanly weakness began to take the colour of judgment and resolution.

It is a wooden kind of man who believes implicitly in his own strength, and Searle knew too well the elements of his weakness. And to suffer in silence—is not such reticence oftener from weakness than from strength? The strength that controls, he reflected, may seem great when it copes with impulses of little force.

So he persisted in offering to himself, or to the typical humanity in him, reasons and excuses. He could not consent to sink to a lower level of self-control, and he was oppressed by the recurring question as to the quality, the meaning, of his unburdenment—whether it was wisdom or luck that had given him relief, and gained, as he believed, a friend. And what would that friend think of him? A man does not willingly accept pity from a woman except the pity be largely diluted with admiration. Yet he was not so mean as to resent a woman's help.

His line of thought had one inevitable result. It exalted Miss Harland to a place apart in his imagination. If she were less than noble-minded, his confidences were more than indiscreet, they

were fatuous. Against his will he recalled instances that he had known of strange confidences; he passed to Lucy Snowe's confession in "Villette," to the man in the "Kreutzer Sonata" who forced his terrible story upon a stranger. Here the impulse was everything, the auditor nothing. The Ancient Mariner, too, poured out his history to a mere block of a Wedding Guest, who gave, and could give nothing in return.

He recalled Ursula Harland's bearing, her few words aptly spoken in which encouragement went before sympathy, respect before pity. She was a woman to get the best out of a man by her grave acceptance of him at his worst. A man is less than a man if he can think long of such a woman's mental qualities alone. Searle found himself musing on the picture rather than on its meaning. She was a good English type, she had started fairly with features not amiss, but, as with the best faces, her beauty owed most to its acquired expression. The gravity of good thoughts was in her eyes, but it was a gravity that could break into gaiety. Her laugh was a relaxation; it expressed her; but under a new condition. It took nothing from

her gravity, but it qualified it. He tried to recall the colour of her hair. He remembered something of a charm in its slight disorder, and considered whether this was an accidental quality or the effect of a conscious art. He preferred the simpler explanation.

The next morning he opened a letter addressed in an unfamiliar hand, and read :

“Dear Mr. Searle,

Yesterday you gave me a kind of hold upon you and I mean to insist upon it. I think we may have much in common, and I wish that we might be friends. I am nearly always at home on these winter evenings, and I am free any time after eight. If you would call to see me sometimes it would be a great pleasure to me. If such a proposal is unusual, you have brought it on yourself.

Sincerely yours,

URSULA HARLAND.”

That evening Searle stood for a moment in the road watching the lighted windows of the Red Cottage, as one gazes at the envelope of a letter that promises interest. He saw her shadow large upon the blind as she passed between the

lamp and the window. Eight o'clock was striking as he groped vainly for bell or knocker. Then he knocked with his knuckles upon the door.

She opened it, and he saw her face dimly in the moonlight as she stood with her back to the brighter interior. He was conscious of an excited interest, the turning of a new page in the book of life, as they passed from the little porch directly into her sitting-room.

"You see I didn't give you time to change your mind."

"You are welcome."

"I had not to knock very long."

"Or your knuckles would have been sore. Well, I get a lot of character out of people who come to that door."

"And what did you think of my knock?"

"I thought that you fully intended to come in."

He stood in the middle of the room, looking round with critical approval. He had been in this room before, but he had not noticed it.

She said, "I'm afraid it doesn't show a correct taste."

"A keen interest is better."

Her voice rang pleasantly: "I hope you will find plenty with which to disagree."

"I have a lot to learn from this little room."

They sat down by the fire in comfortable chairs, and smiled at one another without embarrassment. He thought well of the world for holding a woman so pleasant and sensible. She took her needlework and asked him to mend the fire.

"Are you a specialist in any way," he said, "or is it an all-round culture? I don't know much of pictures, but I see that these are good. A lot of nice books, but isn't there a preponderance of modern novels?"

"Well, I can't pretend to be a specialist, but I read a lot of novels because I review them sometimes. I get some work from the *Manchester Herald*. I've begun to learn Latin, and some day I hope to try Greek. Do you believe in people taking themselves seriously? Well, I want to be as good a critic as I can. I think it's possible to exaggerate the need of Latin and Greek, but you know everything is urged against a woman. . . We are supposed to be incapable, so they raise the standard for us."

"So you're a critic."

"That's the ideal—actually a reviewer."

"And you have a set of principles?"

"In solution. My criticisms are not yet dropped from above. Don't you think that the best critic is he who has the most sympathy?"

"Sympathy—yes, an author approves of that naturally. I've written a novel."

"Oh!"

"It was reviewed in the *Manchester Herald*."

She dropped her work—"What is it called?"

"'A Starless Night.'"

Her close scrutiny of him became almost a scowl. "Searle?—yes,—you wrote that?"

They broke together into a laugh.

"You hadn't a good word to say for it."

"I took it seriously."

"I thought it was a veteran reviewer. What was it that you said?—'Greedy of sensation, the young writer sets down horrible mishaps and calls it tragedy.'"

"That's what the young writer does."

"You are younger than I."

"A critic ages fast."

"You said that I halted between an idea and a plot, that my minor characters were irrelevant,

and that my principals frittered themselves away in choppy dialogue.”

“You remember it wonderfully well—most flattering to me.”

“You’re quite old-fashioned. You want a plot.”

“A design.”

“Yes, you said that even the minor characters should help the action. A design—yes—but you may place a character to get a contrast—a value.”

“In the strict economy which is the aim of art, he should help the action. A novel is a stream with contributory rills as well as rivers.”

“It may be a journey along a road.”

He cited classical instances in his support, and they discussed the question with interest, happy temper, and the approach to a common view which is usual between sincere and sympathetic disputants. He returned at last to the personal point.

“Don’t you feel very much embarrassed?”

“Oh! but I’m sure I said something that you liked.”

“Yes—you said that you believed that there was one difference between me and the ordinary

green pessimist—that I did seem to have the capacity for making myself miserable.”

“That was clever of me.”

“It was a gross infringement upon my private life.”

“But you are that sort of person, aren’t you?”

“That’s the woman reviewer; it comes to personalities sooner or later.”

“Well, your next book must be a brighter one.”

“I must take the large Shakespearean view of life, I suppose.”

“Perhaps the middle-sized Shakespearean view would do for a commencement.”

“Why should I conform to a particular standard of optimism?”

“Why should your critics conform to your particular standard of pessimism?”

“My work must express myself.”

“Your best self—your healthy self.”

“Myself.”

“Then we come to the question of publication. If art is unmoral, publication certainly comes within the moral region.”

“But who’s to be the censor?”

“Yourself, I suppose. You must divide yourself into several persons. When the creative impulse is on, the others must get out of the way. Very well; but this being over, and the god or the monster born, the moral judgment steps in and takes command. Your artist disclaims moral control now-a-days. His fine frenzy continues until he has struck a bargain with his publisher.”

“Well, I can’t stand these fellows who take up morality as an artistic phase.”

“Oh! such phases are not for an artist; he must develop. Sincerity is everything.”

“And do you think that such books as mine do any harm?”

“Perhaps not much to the readers.”

“Well, you reviewers are a supercilious lot.”

“You like the old sledge-hammer style?”

“What I complain of is that the cultivated person is a little too frigid. He rates reticence too highly.”

“Art is a matter of control.”

“Yes, control, control, but not too much control.”

“It’s driving the chariot of the sun.”

“Or delving in a dark hole.”

“Of course some suns are small, with broken down horses in the chariots.”

“Then it’s not all control. The whip as well as the curb. But these metaphors are misleading. What remains is that you are a cold-hearted reviewer. I once knew a reviewer of novels who was invariably favourable. He said it did no harm, and he was sorry for the poor devils. It was good for the publishing trade, good for the review trade, and it contributed to the greatest happiness of the greatest number ; also that it would be all the same a hundred years hence.”

“Quite different.”

“Control, in life too, I suppose.”

“Yes, a clever man thinks he has the world at his feet, but it’s as difficult to be a good man as a good novelist, and quite as interesting.”

“And if a man is a sincere pessimist he should attempt the key of the Cheeryble brothers ? ”

“He may be as sincere and as pessimistic as he pleases in his own back garden. If he goes out into the world, he must consider the world.”

“Do you believe in getting on ? ”

“For some men ambition is a virtue. Your

fine-spun inwardness may need a qualification—even a gross one. I'm speaking for the man; his work in the world is another consideration."

"Yes, but there's a good kind of egoism surely. Don't you find a subdued self-consciousness in the best people?"

"Yes, it's not enough to know, to express. One must hold oneself—reduce oneself to the right proportions."

"Morality is, then, the sense of proportion."

"To fill a place, to do what's wanted."

"Not to get on?"

"The world must get on. Nothing oppresses me so much as the thought that we may all be marking time, or retrogressing."

"Of course you are a Democrat?"

"Hardly a sound one. It's the individual that interests me. I'm not stirred easily for a class except through him."

"Well, none of us are excited by statistics."

"You think me rather a prig, don't you?"

"You are wise beyond your years."

"Don't let me frighten you away by my moralising."

"No; if you make it a condition of my coming here, I shall try to be moral too."

“ I shall insist on your being happy, which is half the battle.”

“ I don’t anticipate much difficulty while I’m here.”

“ You must keep it up.”

“ I shall be looking forward to my next visit.”

VII

A MODERN TOURNAMENT

DURING the summer the social life of Darley centred in the tennis ground. Here were exercised the fine shades of exclusion which, in a suburban village, make up much of the art of life ; and here, on certain afternoons, assembled most of what aspired to rank and fashion in Darley. Even the golfers, whom English social conditions have not yet finally assimilated, sometimes shortened their rounds that they might call in at tea-time.

It was an afternoon in early June when Searle found himself assisting at what had been described on his card of invitation as a "tournament on the American system." He was presented to a young lady whom the fortune of the draw had made his partner, and learnt, with some dismay, that the conditions of the conflict precluded a

decent retirement at the end of the first round ; it was necessary to meet the whole of the dozen or so of competitors who contended for Mrs. Hay Forwood's silver cream jug, this being the special feature of the American system, characteristic of a young and vigorous nation. Searle was an unpractised and indifferent player, to the evident disappointment of his partner, who accepted his apologies with tragic resignation. She herself served four faults consecutively, and was on the point of tears. A smart shower intervened, driving players and spectators to shelter in the little wooden hut, which soon became chock full.

Here Mr. Millington held forth on the advantages of lawn tennis, and its superiority to golf. "It is a higher development," he said, "necessarily more difficult to play."

"Why more difficult?" was asked.

Mr. Millington had expected the enquiry. "If for no other reason," he said, "because there is a moving ball to be struck ; in golf the ball is stationary."

There was no reply to this until Ursula said, reflectively : "Yes, just as conversation is so much more difficult than literature."

By the majority of the company this was accepted as a serious remark. Millington, always suspicious of Ursula, looked doubtful, but continued: "Then in the double game such varieties of combination are possible. A game which permits of combination must be better than one without it."

"Then should you say," asked Searle, "that the value of a game rises in proportion to the combination that it permits? If so, football and lacrosse must be preferred."

A lady here observed that football was very rough.

"Football must be a fine game to the two captains," said Ursula. "They are generals, and they fight hand to hand too."

"But if you come to fighting," said Mrs. Brayshaw, "the duel is best. Why was the duel abolished?"

"Because," said Mr. Millington, with a reassuring look round upon the ladies, "sentiment, moral sentiment, rebelled against it as iniquitous. The march of civilization——."

"It only means that you got frightened," said Mrs. Brayshaw. "Moral sentiment travels a little behind the event in real life. The middle

classes got the upper hand, and they like to be safe."

"Is it possible," said Searle, "to conceive a civilisation — rather, a development — that is nothing more than the perfecting of the duel? If we come from wild beasts mightn't we have chanced to evade this altruistic cross? As it is, all 'civilised' life is a competitive struggle."

"Life is to the observer now rather than to the actor," said Ursula.

"Now I begin to understand you," said Mrs. Forwood, "you mean it will be like the case of the ten special correspondents who went to the races third class, in order to study character, and all got into the same compartment."

"And all the great posts will go a begging," said Ursula, "and quiet old gentlemen will be forced to become cabinet ministers and to lead armies, and the Prince of Wales will abdicate if he can find a successor."

"There would be a reaction," said Mrs. Brayshaw, "we should want to be kings and leaders again."

"Imagination would supply all that."

"Imagination wants food like everything else."

Your bourgeois poets would want rousing with the clash of steel."

Mr. Millington had vainly attempted to follow all this. "Then do I understand," he said, with feeble assertion, "that you favour the retention of the duel?"

"We must have duels of some kind while we can still hate as we do," said Mrs. Brayshaw, "and the sword and pistol kind seem the most harmless. A little flesh wound and they embrace and swear eternal friendship. Our quiet duels don't come to such a happy crisis."

"But mayn't even duels of the wits be conducted without malice?" said Ursula.

The rain had abated and the "tournament" was resumed. Mrs. Brayshaw, called upon to take her place in the court, suavely declined to wet her feet. She and Ursula remained alone in the hut.

"What is fighting without hatred for a motive?" she continued; "and one can't hate an army or a nation. Hatred or emulation, they can only exist, at their best, between two. Don't you think so, Ursula?"

"At their worst, yes."

"Ah! yes, the moral standard. I shall be

afraid to hate you. It will seem a kind of impiety."

"It would show a want of proportion—to break a butterfly on the wheel."

"Do yourself justice, my dear Miss Harland; you are a woman that one could hate."

Ursula wondered at the bitterness of her speech.

"I know you," she continued. "You are liberal and independent; it gives you freedom of action. You believe in a generous emulation, but that is easy when you are successful. You have charity for all beneath you; pray what is the difference between charity and contempt?"

"What have they in common?"

"It's a great game that we can play but once. We theorise about our motives when we have nothing better to do. I like a bold player who takes the risks."

"I don't see the application."

Searle approached the hut, and the two women seeing him glanced at one another. Their eyes met, but Ursula resolutely repressed an answering intelligence. As he entered, Mrs. Brayshaw cried briskly: "Ah! Mr. Searle, we are just quarrelling about you."

Searle made a gesture of deprecation, as she continued: "I tell her that she has no right to monopolise you. You are to her giving up what was meant for mankind—or womankind. I speak for the slighted Darley ladies, who are left desolate at their tea-parties."

"You see tea makes me so nervous."

"And you want to keep an appetite for your supper. I speak figuratively. No doubt it's a purely intellectual séance—on equal terms of course. As for me, I tremble when Miss Harland calls. Knowing how good and thoughtful she is, I fear there's something wrong with me, that I have become an object for charity, am visibly on the decline."

Searle smiled grimly. "I'm always glad of help," he said.

"Here's Mrs. Forwood," said Mrs. Brayshaw. "Mrs. Forwood, don't you think that monopoly heads the vices?"

"Heads what vices?"

"I can't enumerate them, there are so many now-a-days; they come out like the new shades for the spring."

"And you choose what harmonises with your character," said Ursula.

"Yes. I think a very delicate shade of green jealousy will suit me."

"What are you talking about?" asked Mrs. Forwood.

"About Miss Harland's wickedness. She has cut us all out. Mr. Searle was a new excitement. We were all scheming to get at him, especially as he was so unapproachable. How to capture him—it was quite a problem, like the Gordian, or is it Gordian, knot. Ursula cut it. Most unfair I say. I don't think our knives would have been sharp enough though. She said: 'Come in every evening until further notice.' Now I should never have thought of that. Would you?"

"I think that even Mr. Searle every evening"—

"That's what I say. He ought to be distributed."

"Is it my punishment, then, to be torn limb from limb?" said Searle.

"Like a Christmas cracker—yes, and who's to get the heart?"

"I am greatly flattered by all this," he said.

"Then the dislocation is beginning, for we have turned your head."

This talk seemed to Ursula somewhat forced

and wild. She had been startled at Mrs. Brayshaw's tone, the cause for which she now seemed to reveal obscurely. It was impossible to explain the reason of her sudden intimacy with Searle. From the possible result of that intimacy she would have turned her thoughts away. It had begun in charity—she shrank from the application of the word to him. Yet if it lay in her power to bring a third into their friendship, she knew that her will would rebel against it. Rivalry—conscious and militant rivalry—in affairs of the sexes had always seemed to her particularly odious. A recollection—seemingly irrelevant—came to her of some trait or story of the late Mr. Brayshaw. It drew her eyes to a scrutiny of his widow. In the human face we see very much what we bring. That firm, hard beauty, confessing so little of the soul within, struck her to a sudden pity. When they were again alone she touched the other's hand in a momentary caress. "I wish that we might be friends," she said.

Mrs. Brayshaw started, and her face lost its rigidity in a waver of obscure emotion.

But from outside, Mrs. Forwood's good-humoured rattle broke upon them, and she rose

with a smile:—"Your consideration does you credit. Perhaps some day I may pity you."

"My own needs"—

"Oh! we are very good friends."

Ursula bowed and left the hut. She felt to the full the chagrin that attends the repulse of a sentimental advance.

VIII

TENTATIVE

ADELAIDE BRAYSHAW's husband, a Lancashire manufacturer of substance and repute, had died three years before the time at which this narrative begins. Their married life had been not unsuccessful—the contract had been fairly carried out between the rich middle-aged bourgeois and the poor governess, and Mrs. Brayshaw, finding herself still young and eminently “well left,” could look back upon her married life with equanimity, almost with regrets. She “really rather liked the man,” as she said in one of her bursts of indiscreet confidence. She assumed the proper degree, which was the extreme degree, of mourning, and wore it for very nearly the prescribed time. Mr. Brayshaw's relatives had nothing to complain about, save that, as was natural, she had inherited the bulk of a fortune which, under other circumstances, might have

been more widely distributed. Indeed, for some little time they beset her with attentions, and it had taken a year or two to shake them off.

Her husband had been a dull companion, but rarely an irritating one; he had permitted her to choose her own friends, to come and go pretty much as she pleased, and, within the necessary limits, to live her own life. Such a life was certainly circumscribed, but to an indolence that checked ambition she united an alertness of mind that found much with which to occupy itself in her surroundings. There was now no particular reason for her to remain in Darley save that there seemed no particular reason for going away. Occasionally she went to London, but, like most people of some local importance, she felt that the widening of the horizon hardly atoned for what seemed like a shrinkage of her personality. Nevertheless, the accumulated *ennui* of the winter in Darley caused her to regard the arrival of Searle as a welcome stimulant. She was a young woman; she had never loved; and the vague hopes that animated her sometimes sought to justify their existence. Searle was, by all available standards, a man of distinction and account, and she was sufficiently enlightened to

rate him highly. That he should be so suddenly annexed by Ursula Harland chagrined and excited her. She was accustomed to measure herself against Ursula, but hitherto, in the strife of wits, she had been worsted only by Ursula's graciousness. A young, handsome, and rich woman of a contentious mind cannot readily see limits to her powers of attraction. Adelaide Brayshaw had the confidence of a woman who has attempted little. Searle's indifference, quite inoffensive in its expression, and united to an amiability that seemed sometimes too finely expressed to be merely general, helped to magnify his personal charm. He was surprised one day to receive a visit from her at his office in Manchester. She consulted him about a small matter of business, and stayed a little on his assurance that he had nothing to do. She mentioned the name of her regular lawyer, and said: "I suppose I oughtn't to throw him over for you?"

"Much better not."

"I suppose yours is a very disinterested profession?"

"There have been sacrifices in it."

She looked round the office,—“And so you come here every day. What extraordinary crea-

tures men are. Don't you hate the place? And yet I was a governess once, you know. I oughtn't to stop here like this, ought I?

"Why not?"

"Isn't it very unconventional?"

"I disregard conventions systematically."

"I know you do. But here is a new system."

"Governed by the same laws."

"But there is not the same attraction."

"It is difficult to measure."

Searle had the thought that such dialogue as this, evading the plain word, might carry one to unintended depths. He added: "I'm glad to see you."

It sounded a little crude when she replied: "It is kind of you to give me the assurance."

It struck him that he was dealing with a variety of jealousy—an attenuated and irrelevant jealousy—for he was no coxcomb, and did not readily conceive himself to be a provocative of the pure passion. His friendship for Ursula, or at least his visits to her, were no doubt a subject for the Darley gossip. Perhaps Mrs. Brayshaw aspired to the undisputed lead in Darley society, and the ludicrousness of an ambition that could be satisfied with such a domination provoked the

contrast of Ursula's endeavour to govern and express herself.

Certainly, if Mrs. Brayshaw wished to reign in Darley, he had failed in his homage. It might be possible to regard her as a queenly woman, and if, in these days, the queenly woman is only a splendid survival, the modern man is many-sided in his appreciations, or at least in his weaknesses.

As he dismissed these remote inchoate speculations, he became conscious of her curious regard.

"Have you made it right with your conscience?" she said.

"Conscience is supposed to have had its day, hasn't it? My own impression is that we are discarding it too soon. We are still liable to a few crude impulses that are not quite matters for the police."

"I took you for a conscientious man."

"You happen to have seen me when the good impulses predominated."

"Well the good people are being badly treated now that the theories of exquisite selfishness have come in. First they were deprived of their prospect of reward in the next world; now they get no thanks in this."

"I daresay we shall want them again."

"You think me an idle, useless person, don't you? What shall I do to be saved? What ought we to do, we people with incomes, who don't work?"

"It's a matter of small consequence except to yourselves. You can't last for ever."

"Goodness! what is to be done with us?"

"You'll be shouldered out."

"It'll last my time, won't it?"

"Are you content to exist as a survival?"

"What I could do would be on such a small scale. It wouldn't be exciting enough unless I could have a good big millennium all to myself. To sacrifice oneself seems possible, but I couldn't be always drilling myself. Don't infer that I'm a bad woman, but I haven't the benevolent itch. I always give myself the benefit of the doubt. I don't deny myself anything"—she paused a little and met his eyes—"and not much to my friends."

Searle felt a little flattered by this visit, but he wished that it would end. She continued: "Don't you think that there is something nice in people being good to you because they like you?"

He assented to this artless enquiry.

“Some people are good merely by way of creating a record—the pride of never giving in. But it must be pleasant to feel that you are one of the elect. They haven’t the excitement of wondering how they’ll turn out though. As the world becomes virtuous, isn’t there a danger of its being a little dull? By-the-bye, how is Miss Harland?”

“You find Miss Harland dull?”

She laughed: “No, that’s what annoys me; she isn’t; her virtues are picturesque and aggressive.”

He began to wonder what she was driving at, and by a natural coincidence a similar thought crossed her own mind. The uselessness, the aimlessness of this interview were evident to her—perhaps to him. He met her eyes calmly, sometimes curiously she imagined. She was powerless—forestalled. She had a moment’s glimpse of her dreary life and what it might have been. Looking at her watch: “It’s too bad of me,” she said, “I’ve just time now. So much pleasanter than waiting at the station.”

When he was alone he wondered idly whether this woman would have attracted him if he had not met Ursula. He was not quite indifferent

to her ; for some reason rather sorry for her ; and with a certain delicacy of consideration he refrained from a direct comparison with Ursula ; but his thoughts turned with a wistful impulse to the Red Cottage, to its clean and spare beauty, its rich homeliness, and presently they rested without reserve on its mistress.

IX

A SUMMER DAY

SEARLE was not usually a very early riser, but on this morning of early June he was awakened by the sun, which shone blindingly upon him. For some time he rebelled against the necessity, apparent at once, of rising to adjust the curtains. When at last his inertia was overcome and the movement accomplished, he lingered to look out into the village. It wore the aspect of glorified peace that belongs to a still, sunny morning. Opening wide the window, he breathed deeply of the fresh keen air. His languor fled in a delicious shudder, and, turning from the window, he glanced regretfully towards the bed and made for his bath.

Outside the house, he heard the church clock chime the half-hour—half-past-six—two minutes fast by his watch. He had a clear hour before breakfast, an hour won, as it seemed, from the

deeps, precious, full of happy chances; no common hour. He had no hesitation about direction, nor did he pretend to himself that he had. Half-way up the hill he saw something moving in the garden of the Red Cottage, and his heart gave a great bound, but when he got to the gate there was no one to be seen, the door was shut, and the world seemed suddenly empty and cold. But as he walked past very slowly, looking over his shoulder, she came round the corner of the cottage carrying a flower-pot and a kitten. She saw him and the flower-pot dropped with a crash on the walk. He opened the gate and walked towards her, smiling broadly: "I'm afraid I startled you," he said.

"Oh! no—nothing startling in a man walking up the hill."

"A man?"

"Well, I suppose that on such a morning a man feels very like a god."

"You were not startled, then?"

"Certainly not."

"I wonder why you dropped the pot."

"Er—well—I meant just then to put down the kitten, and I dropped the wrong one."

He laughed out freshly and delightfully. "Oh! how glad I am that I got up."

"Yes, why did you get up so early?"

"Rather why do I ever get up late?"

"Well this is a morning, isn't it? To tell the truth, I'm not always up so soon. It was a bird—a thrush—I had the fancy that it was calling me to come into the garden—me—me in particular—I wasn't satisfied with my general share of it all, and I made believe so hard, that it got me up. I didn't want to get up, but somehow I had to."

"And I was awakened by the sun."

"Oh! how grand! What it is to be a man."

They looked at one another smiling, then round upon the flowers, down the road, up into the sky; again their eyes met. They stood in happy silence in a perfect world, joyously at peace. The church clock chimed.

"Oh! leave us alone," said Searle.

"It's only a poor mechanical clock."

"It reminds us that there is a past and a future."

"Ah! the future."

"The immediate future. In an hour or two I must go to that beastly town."

“Take a holiday.”

“A holiday?” he cried, “that’s an idea, let us have a holiday.”

“Us?”

“Why what kind of a holiday would it be without you?”

“I’m your serious friend, your safe, serious friend.”

“Then you want a holiday too. Safe? Serious? Yes, and something besides. Will you be unconventional? We’ll go for the day. How stupid not to have thought of this before. This comes of lying abed.” He plucked out his watch.

“There’s a train Buxton way about this time. We can just catch it, and we’ll breakfast—where? Are you ready? Do come; really, really I mean it. There’s no time to lose.”

“How delightful it would be; and are you sure you’ve not gone mad?”

“Mad? I never was so sane. I’m brilliantly sane.” A bell rang.

“There it is,” he cried, “there’s the bell; not a moment to lose.”

He seized her hand and pulled her down the walk.

"Oh ! but it won't do," she said.

"All women are conventional at heart."

"No, they're not," and she began to follow him. As they hustled through the gate she looked apprehensively at the cottage opposite, and had a fleeting relief from its close-drawn blinds.

"But I must tell Betsy."

"Too late," and they were running down the hill.

"It's my garden hat and I've no gloves, nor sunshade, and I have to go out to tea, and Betsy will be alarmed ; and what will people say ? I *must* go back."

He released her hand and slackened speed.
"You are free."

She looked at his face and ran past him, saying: "Don't let us miss it."

They arrived panting and scrambled, without tickets, into an empty carriage as the train moved off.

He said: "What I like about you is that you can be a child."

There were tears in her eyes. "I can be a baby, too, she said. I'm not going to spoil the expedition, but it takes a little time to get the

right note. I feel a kind of loneliness; yes, I seem isolated. I'm conventional I suppose. It was such a hurry and I've had no breakfast, and I hadn't time to decide whether it was right. Yes, I'm a child. I try to fancy myself a strong woman. I look down on the people who haven't wills. Now I'm afraid of being hysterical. Don't mind me. Oh! yes, help me." She sank back.

He leant forward and took her hand: "What does a little hysteria matter? I'm not lonely nor isolated now. No man had ever a better friend."

She flushed, and breathing quickly said:

"I did help you?"

"You save me."

"There is no happiness like serving a friend."

"Yes: to accept a service, a great service from a lover."

"A lover!"

"You have rendered the service. Now will you make me happy?"

The rumble of the train was his excuse for crossing to her side. She said faintly:

"You want me then just to complete a sensation?"

"Oh! you always have your wits about you."

She laughed: "You seemed to be putting it rather neatly too."

"You want a rough sincerity?"

"Sincerity, certainly."

"Must a man take no pains over his love-making?"

"Unhappy modern young man—always on the stretch."

"To blurt out things—is that sincerity? To reach after an ideal—to be a little better than one's best—that's falsehood?"

"No, I should want my lover to be a highly interesting moral study."

"Love, then, is to be a kind of glorified investigation."

"To include that—I'm a critic, you know—that's my work, and I must love with the best of my faculties."

"Poor modern young woman! Always on the watch. I thought that love was blind."

She turned a little, and glancing at him, shook her head. He continued:—"But you'll know too much; you'd find him out; criticism is science, isn't it?"

"Well—science only reveals new infinitudes. It's the sword lopping off the heads of Hydra."

"To be your lover is a great and difficult ambition."

"I would have it so."

"I foresee that it will be a great mental strain. I must be constantly on the alert. Indolent as I am, the idea fascinates me. When I come home"—He stopped suddenly, as he caught her widening eye.

"You seem to foresee a great deal."

"I beg you to pardon me." He touched her hand. "Now the plain word."

"Oh! no, this is a holiday—an irresponsible holiday—no plainness, no seriousness. Who is being conventional now? Why, you want to save the situation."

"I want an answer to a plain question."

"You can't have it. I require time for reflection."

"Be serious."

"I'm so serious, that I'm afraid of being heavy."

"Cross the Rubicon."

"No—I like dabbling about in it."

"Well, I'm rather glad that you are not an entirely sensible woman."

"A man likes a woman for her faults."

"The dimples in her character—yes."

"And if she has none, she must assume a few."

"Otherwise her virtues might seem a little crude, certainly."

"To the man of the world who has taken the edge off all his qualities."

"A gibe at the man of the world can't hurt me. I'm far out of the world now."

"In Purgatory are you?"

"But very near to Paradise."

They got out at a wayside station, paid their money, and set off down the road towards the village. Searle went back for a moment to speak to the porter.

"Now why do you look so shame-faced?" she said.

"Do I? I was only asking for a telegraph office?"

"Oh! and you wouldn't let me tell Betsy. I see you manage your rash exploits carefully."

"The fact is, I had an appointment with a client."

"And you'll be thinking of him all day instead of—"

"Of you—well, I thought of him through you."

“How so?”

“Well, I was thinking of you—if it is thinking—and then—well, I was considering that I must keep my connection together now, and work hard”—

“Oh! this will never do. Where’s your lightness of touch?”

“I’m afraid I’m getting serious.”

“Send your telegram—send your telegram.”

“You think I’d better do that?”

“I suppose so.”

“Yes, we must be careful now.”

“Now?”

“I’m so glad that you counsel me to send it.”

“If you didn’t you would have a gloomy far-away look in your eye all day.”

“Certainly gloomy if far away.”

He despatched his telegram, and soon they were breakfasting in the best parlour of the village inn, a musty little room decorated with portraits of local magnates, stout gentlemen in hunting dress for the most part—prints of fat cattle, Rebecca at the Well, and an idealised representation of the Prodigal Son in top-boots.

They regarded their surroundings with satisfaction. It was still early, and the brightness of

the morning was upon them. They looked at one another with frank and joyful eyes. Their talk became slower, and from time to time they fell into silence. Their hands touched in the offices of the table, and they realised a fellowship even in sharing the common food.

Presently they went into the sunlight and wandered down the road. They were enriched as though by some glorious legacy. The earth was theirs, firm beneath their feet, yet mysterious and fantastic, always beautiful. The day unrolled itself in a great harmony, yet Nature's own strange evolutions went on as ever. The strong and voracious preyed upon the weak, perfections of tree and flower tended inevitably to decay; but to-day the world was subject to their emotions; it had produced them; soon it would engulf them; the moment was theirs.

Their eyes rested, with satisfied possession, on long stretches of the dusty road, the sight of which had depressed many a weary wayfarer. Their destination was unknown or forgotten; the road was enough. They talked of what they saw and heard, of birds and beasts, of the hills and trees, but with an appreciation that was instinctively limited. Of change and death in

connection with the life they saw, they thought as little as of the geology of the hills; while their perceptions deepened, their intelligences slumbered.

The sun rose high in the heavens and the heat of the day approached. The noise of insects sounded to them like the whirr of the distant world's machinery. He touched her hand and held it; it was moist with sweat like his own. Hand in hand now they walked beneath the blazing sun, strong and elated.

Far down the road a figure appeared, recalling them to the ignoble social world, powerful even here, and they disjoined hands. Nature was in their confidence, but not mankind. Indeed the old bent labourer who approached, and passed them with an incurious "Good-day," seemed to have more affinity to the trees and fields than to the world they knew. Strong as they were in the union of their youth, this old solitary man brought to them the remembrance of loss and change. When they joined hands again they were lovers, but they were helpmates too.

They dined gaily at one o'clock off roast beef and apple pie. Then they explored a famous cavern, and from its delicious cold depths they came forth to revel again in the blinding, burning sun-

shine. They sat on the hill-side and watched the little fleecy clouds till they felt hungry again, and went back to the inn for tea.

They walked back in the cool of the evening. In the solitary valley, traversed by the long shadows of the hills, he stopped and turned to her:—"It has not been said."

"What need to say it?"

He kissed her hand and drew her to him. She, too, met him with a frank embrace, and he felt about him the strong sustaining clasp of her arms.

Seated again in the railway-carriage, their thoughts ran on before them to Darley. Something of their escapade must be known, and few people are quite impervious to opinion. However, as Ursula said, "it's all right now, and it will save a formal announcement."

"You must confess," said Searle, "that though such an excursion as we have had to-day might properly be taken by any two friends"—she laughed—"you wouldn't like to face Mr. Millington if you couldn't flaunt our engagement."

"Ah! Mr. Millington; how far off he has been to-day, and I dreamt of him the other night."

"Of him?"

"Yes, and of Judgment Day. Do long-lost impressions ever come back to you in dreams? I think my notion of it came from an old picture of my childhood; great vistas of angels trumpeting; there was an outer darkness too, and a formidable rumbling in my dream. Do you know, I had a feeling of regret that I shouldn't be able to play lawn tennis that afternoon. There was a great wind, and I wished it wouldn't blow my skirts about; and I thought that if I could get nearer to the throne, it would be quieter and perhaps safer. Suddenly I saw the face of the figure enthroned, and it was Mr. Millington's. I knew I was lost, and I cried out that it wasn't fair—he didn't understand—but I was borne away."

"And how would you have felt had I been on the throne?"

"I should have had to admit that it wasn't any fairer."

"Well, you're a delightful child."

"And do you know, you can be nice in a light way; it's not every man that can be happy gracefully."

"No, I generally like people less as their spirits rise."

"That's the way with you miserable people. You want to drag us all down."

"We English are too busy to cultivate gaiety, and we do it badly."

"The man who is cheerful from conviction is worst of all, but for you it's a dreadful mistake to be so gloomy."

"We are cast for the wrong parts in this world."

"But an artist is always interesting in a foreign medium."

"You find he has curious limitations though."

"They are an aid to friendship."

"How?"

"Well, one can't feel friendly toward a man who is infinite in every direction."

"Then it is the weaknesses and faults of our friends that we love."

"As you said earlier in the day. At least there must be a touch of pathos in love."

"I am pathetic to you?"

"And I to you?"

"If you love me—yes."

"Well, let us hope that there are faults on both sides."

"That's what is said at a later stage."

“We are not that kind of people.”

“Yet how ordinary one is,—You may not believe it, but I should really like—and one cannot embrace an infinitude.”

“Oh! try to preserve your dignity.”

“I will—I’ll keep it for another day.”

So they degenerated to nonsense. Speech was inadequate, and they rejected it as an expression to use it as a plaything; but these trivialities were, they knew, but as bubbles on the face of a stream that ran deep and pure. Thankfulness and peace were in their hearts while gaiety rioted on the surface. They walked up the hill together and found the anxious Betsy peering out for them. Ursula said: “Well, Betsy, we’ve had a fine day for it.”

“For it, Miss?” Are ye married ma’am?”

“Good heavens! What do you mean Betsy?”

“Fine day for what, Miss?”

“For our—walk.”

“Now Betsy,” said Searle, “you’re all right. You’re a very smart girl; we’re going to be married. Stupidly, we never thought of doing it to-day; but then we should want you to be there.”

“Oh! Betsy, and I was thinking what a

surprise it would be to you. What made you think of such a thing?"

"Well, Miss, I saw you a running down the hill, and then Mrs. Brayshaw put it into my head."

"Mrs. Brayshaw? Has she been here?"

"She called, Miss, and somehow she got it out of me about your going off. I didn't mean to tell; I didn't think I was telling, but—"

"And what did she say?"

"She said something about a runaway match."

Searle followed Ursula into the sitting room. She sat down and looked about her rather blankly.

"I don't like change," she said.

"This is not a great change."

"It marks one. It's something of a disappointment."

"Don't say that."

"Our friendship was such a good thing. There was something high and fine about it. Now it's gone; it's swallowed up."

"But it's contained; it's enriched; it's a glorified friendship."

"Not the same."

"Ursula."

"Oh! far better, but there is an oppression in

too much happiness, and I wanted to relieve myself with these small regrets."

"There is one thing I must say," said Searle, "You are marrying beneath you."

"Whatever do you mean?"

"I don't mean birth, or position, or money. You're better than I am; you're stronger and clearer. I don't altogether like acknowledging it, but it's true."

"No, I'm more stolid than you are. It's not a virtue, but it keeps my virtues together. I won't hear you dispraise yourself; it's magnanimous; not easy for a man, I know; and let me tell you"—she came nearer to him and put her hand on his shoulder—"I'm grateful to you for helping me to be my best; nothing less was good enough for you. That I may help you as you help me, that I wish—an equality of friendship—I do wish for that; it's not wrong, not unwomanly, I'm sure. Equality? It's not quite that: closeness, intimacy, equal terms."

"You give me strength and confidence. Yet I ask you this: how can you escape—how can one be secure from the chances, the physical accidents, that warp a man's nature, that lose his soul? There's a breaking point for all.

You love me now. It's a great possession, but to lose it"—

"It can't be lost. What is, remains. The present lasts for ever. At the very least," she touched his shoulder, "I have you as you are."

"You might read me differently in the light of later events.

"I should rather read the later events by my present light."

"Can you really bring this high philosophy into this make-shift world?"

"Oh! I am strong. I am strong and confident now."

X

SHADOWS

THE week that followed was their happy week. Searle managed to get up to the Red Cottage every morning before leaving for town, and as he returned early, the long summer evenings, crowded with fresh impressions, seemed like days. Their intercourse gained a deeper note. Opinions, expressions, had a graver significance in the light of their new relation. Each sounded the other for agreement or for interesting divergence, and each rejoiced to find that prevailing harmony which, comprehending many differences, gives the full assurance of a true marriage. He told her more than he had yet done of his life, and it seemed to him now that his autobiography took very much the cast of a confession. Everything that he had failed to do now seemed so much better worth doing. He had to speak of no gross sins, and indeed his offences were

mostly against himself. The recurring fits of morose depression that had eaten into his life like a canker seemed now remote and hardly credible. He could recall calmly incidents which, but a short time before, he must have banished resolutely from his mind, lest he should fall under the power of their morbid fascination. For some time after the death of his father, he had been oppressed by the vague dread something of which is common even to unimaginative persons in like circumstances. The horrors of the day were not less to him than the horrors of the night. Each day, with the blackness of night behind it, the blackness of night waiting to engulf it, seemed less tolerable than the last. That with the rising of the sun his misery should continue unassuaged, that his daily life should so utterly have lost its savour, filled him with despair of the future too. The impulse was strong within him to rebel by some violent act against this desperate apathy. One afternoon in school a casual reproof from an undermaster for some slight misdemeanour roused the flame. He rose from his seat, tearing his exercise across and scattering the leaves abroad. His gaping school-mates saw him mount the head-master's stool,

then unoccupied, seize a ruler, and kick over the desk. The master was sent for, and hurried in to find the school silently watching the mad offender, who sat with knees up, head drooping, and the ruler wagging in his grasp like the sceptre of a drunken monarch. Expulsion followed the escapade, which was only the first of a series of occasional rashnesses, meaningless and incoherent, which disturbed without relieving the dulness of his life. Nevertheless, the daily routine, the habit of living, prevailed until, by the deaths of his mother and his sister, the ties that bound him to the wisdom of custom seemed loosened, he fell into casual and desultory ways, his practice declined, his social relations became impossible. At last an instinct of self-preservation led him to change his environment, to make a fresh attempt, and he entered into partnership with a Manchester firm of solicitors. The exercise of his profession had been carried on with a fair measure of satisfaction and success, and the necessity of considered action had done something to strengthen and confirm his mind.

“It is rather a depressing thing sometimes,” he said to Ursula, “to recognise how sane and

ordinary I am ; I havn't the excuse of madness ; excessive foolishness is as far as I can go, and it can carry me to great lengths."

"I'm wise enough for two."

"And you are not afraid of me? You have no fear for me?"

"My fears are overpowered by hope and trust."

"You raise me to your level. I can't betray you."

A day later, when he met her, his lover's eyes were quick to see a change: "What is it?" he said, "there's a shadow—a cloud."

"Yes—the shadow of a cloud."

"What is it?"

"I have had a letter from a friend—from a woman I used to know. It is very sad. She is ill—dying it seems."

"Ah! we meet it at every turn."

"I am depressed most by my own selfishness, I believe, that or—I will show you the letter—a part of it. It speaks to me in a way that touches me, almost excites me; this is a selfish feeling too; for the woman my sorrow, my feeling, seem strangely inadequate. See, this is it. I like you to see what she says of me. I would not willingly keep from you anything

that might make me better in your eyes. He read :—

“We were not friends—not even closely acquainted, and I remember your disapproval. This might seem an impertinence to anyone but you, but now you are my friend, I claim it confidently. Ursula Harland—Ursula Harland—I thought of you by chance, and I have said your name over and over again for two days, till the desire to see you has grown strong upon me. A taste of life—yet a taste of life. Of some kinds I have had enough and to spare. My life sickens me; I could leave it without regrets; but my mind is clearer now. I have not thought for years; I have never thought till now. In you I see a kind of help—a kind of salvation. I am sinking, and I want a strong hand. No—let me try to be sincere. I am bored to death, and I know of none but you who wouldn’t preach or whine.”

He gave back the letter with a grave face.

“There is more of it,” she said, “but that’s enough. She has no one about her but her servant. I don’t know how long she may live.”

“What has she been?”

“She hasn’t been a good woman.”

“When must you go?”

“Yes! Yes! I knew that I must go. I have rebelled against it all day. I must leave sun-

shine and happiness and life, and go down there to death and misery. You take it for granted that I must go—why? This woman was no friend of mine. She wronged me, or would have done. We had nothing in common. I am charitable, generous, magnanimous, no doubt. They go to make up folly. Of course I go. I'm sorry for her, and shall be ten times more sorry when I see her; but there's no happiness, no recompense in it. And if I stayed, all the pleasure would have evaporated too. There's no credit due to me. I'm not even interesting, I'm only safe. I pile up years of service like a Post Office official. That's what she says, or would say."

"Who?"

"Mrs. Brayshaw. She would say that it's not life."

"It makes life possible, though."

She had spoken between laughing and crying. Searle reflected that her lapses into weakness were no more than rash words; nothing could qualify the staunchness of her acts.

She said: "If you ask me, I will stay."

"I know so well what your help is, that I can't refuse it to another."

It was a gracious speech, not lightly made, as she knew. She caught at his proposal that they should have another day together. He would take a holiday, and they would recall their great day by another excursion. Later in the evening she said: "I must go to-morrow," and though he was disappointed, he acquiesced. Early next morning she met Mrs. Brayshaw in the village. They walked together.

"I have not yet congratulated you. Permit me to do so."

"Thank you."

"Betsy was very much bewildered."

"I must thank you for re-assuring her."

"Betsy is a beautiful example of faith; what she doesn't understand about you is accepted on the strength of what she likes. Well, she will make a very nice little housemaid. You know I think they are always better for having been general servants first."

"I am glad that your views on education are so sound."

"Now, don't be sententious. You distrust my congratulations. It's difficult to be sincere in such matters, but really I admire your success—and his, of course. That's not a nice way to

put it, you think ; but success always seems admirable to me. My tribute is sincere as far as it goes. I don't pretend to be pleased. It was a little obvious, perhaps, but then the really great victories always seem obvious ; they are not left to a chance moment. And that runaway excursion was such a good idea ; it gives quite a flavour of romance."

"What a disagreeable woman you can be."

"And I intended to be so nice to you. I've a sort of twist in my nature. I'm malicious—superficially I think. I don't know ; perhaps it's deep down. Sometimes you might mistake me for a generous woman, but you would be wrong. I give away what's useless. It's not generosity ; it's only clear sight. It's like the chess player who sacrifices a pawn."

"You have a passion for studying yourself."

"Not a passion—that's the wrong word—a disease. My passions are of another kind. Yes, it's disgustingly egotistic. I don't know why, but you always provoke me to a kind of comparison—very much to my disadvantage, of course. My genius is rebuked as it is said Mark Antony's was by Cæsar's. You admire my frankness ?"

"Your frankness is sufficiently mysterious."

"Yes, the human spirit is mysterious, so the nearer one gets to it the more there seems beyond."

"I expect that you'll penetrate to something beautiful presently."

"With something ugly beyond."

"It must be nature at last."

"And may I follow my nature?"

"You can't follow it far unless it conforms to the greater one."

"The simplicities of nature—and how does one distinguish between them and its ferocities?"

"That's the secret of life."

"I shall come to you for support and advice."

"You had better take an instalment at once. I'm going away to-day."

"To-day! not for long?"

"It's indefinite; a friend is ill; it may be some time."

"And Mr. Searle will be left alone?"

"I hope that you won't all avoid him."

"Do you invite me to attempt his consolation?"

"Certainly, if you please."

"Your contempt goes so far?"

"I had no thought of contempt. Pardon me, but you degrade our conversation."

"I'm trying to penetrate to something beautiful. Do you expect scruples, reserves, in dealing with a man who is engaged?"

"I should expect reserves in dealing with any man."

"True ; it makes no difference."

"I didn't say that it makes no difference."

"You ask for some consideration?"

"I ask for nothing."

"I mean that you make a general demand—your moral attitude ——."

"Is this a kind of baiting?"

"Yes, I'm the inferior animal, I see ; a cur trying to rouse the placid, noble beast. You can defend yourself."

"I don't like quarrelling."

"I do. It's better than sitting idle at home."

"Yes, I believe it's your idleness that's to blame."

"For what?"

"Your unsatisfactoriness."

"I must try to find some occupation while you're away."

"You may fill a spare hour by writing to me."

"Thanks. My latest impression of Mr. Searle, I suppose."

"I should be glad to have that."

"I must make a point of seeing him sometimes."

"Pray do. It will be good for both of you, I'm sure."

"And no harm to you."

"Really—really ——."

When they had parted Mrs. Brayshaw drew again upon her scanty recollections of literature. "The Prologue in Heaven," she said to herself, and, pleased with her aptness, she repeated it, smiling.

Searle saw Ursula off from Manchester that afternoon. She was herself again—calm, alert, and cheerful. Her adieux were almost casual, though, he was convinced, not unstudied. She avoided the dolorous note. He brought her the *Athenæum* and *Punch*, and she sent him back for other magazines and papers that might interest the sick woman. As the train started she said: "If you want me badly, I must come."

"Then get out at once."

She shook her head, and they parted with a laugh that died down very quickly.

XI

THE EXPENSE OF SPIRIT

DURING the weeks that followed Searle immersed himself in his work, and even did his best to interest himself in the various diversions of the village. He heard from Ursula constantly, but she said nothing of returning. She wrote :

“Death-bed repentances are out of fashion, but surely there is something in making a good end, in saving something from the wreck. This woman had beauty, riches, and health, and squandered them as such things are squandered. Worst of all, she had a mind out of the common and put it to common uses. Now she is wise, making the best of her time, and, what strikes me with admiration and respect, she wastes none of it in regrets and little in forebodings. We talk and read. Rid at last of the distraction of living, she comes to the best part of her life. It is surprising and terrible that vanity and passion have kept her better parts so long in subjection. Now, when her vision is clearer, she says of the past that if it were to be

lived again it would not be different. 'This is better,' she says, 'it is my choice now; it would not be if I were young and strong.' Does she seem to you unworthy of pity or help? I see her grow weaker day by day. She has not a cultivated taste, but she appreciates intensely and approaches poetry now with the freshness of youth and a startling apprehension. Do you see? Her case is exceptional. She has lived a full life of a kind. Much of the rough material of poetry is hers, and now she brings to it a mature intelligence and a fresh interest. It is a spiritual rejuvenescence on the brink of the grave. I try to imitate her in this seizure of the best that the moment can give. Epicureanism is it? This is too interesting to be wholly depressing."

Later she wrote :

"I grieve to think that the summer is passing and that I am still away from you. I have spoken to her of you, and she tells me, she reiterates, that I must go back to you. I can see in her eyes the fear that I may take her at her word. I can't leave her. I believe she would collapse like a house of cards. It cannot be for long."

Yes, the summer was passing, and Searle found his regrets sometimes verging on irritations. He repressed an unworthy jealousy of the dying woman, who had not merely the

companionship, but, from the necessities of the case, more of Ursula's thoughts, more of her inmost self, than he. It was hardly possible for Ursula to write to him and to ignore the slow tragedy of which she was a spectator, and yet she felt that the constant iteration of depressing items might be harmful to him. She attempted, once or twice, to write with entire detachment from her circumstances, but her thoughts were saturated with them, and such attempts were strained and unnatural. He was excessively disappointed when her letters came less frequently.

He was not well, the hot summer weather exhausted him, and he fought hard against the depression the approach of which he feared. He tried solitary walks, frivolous society, close study, mental dissipation. It was a point of honour that he should hold out; short of utter despair he would not make the appeal to her that he knew would be answered. He encountered Mrs. Brayshaw several times, and though he acknowledged to himself that her society had more attraction for him than that of anyone in Darley, an instinct, which he did not wholly understand, caused him usually to avoid

her. Her bearing towards him was very frank and friendly, and he blamed himself for neglecting—it was not quite slighting—her advances.

August was wet, and his attempts to subdue the humours of the mind by physical exertion were continued under difficulties. To be thoroughly wet through once may be exhilarating, but it becomes tedious by repetition, and he found himself distinctly disinclined for prolonged exertion. During his times of depression he had often fancied himself to be ill, and now again, from time to time, he was subject to a panic of which he was ashamed. He felt weaker; he could not recollect that the hot weather had ever affected him so before; and he found himself considering seriously certain pains and symptoms that a healthier state of mind might have disregarded. At one moment he felt almost convinced that he was seriously ill; presently he was equally sure that he was foolishly conceding to a diseased imagination.

An application from an acquaintance gave him a distracting idea. Before marrying he must, of course, insure, and for some time he found a kind of occupation in unravelling and comparing the conditions of various companies.

Finally, in despair of a clear solution, and to escape a persecution that grew to be excessive, he chose one almost at random and submitted himself to the necessary medical examination.

At the conclusion of the interview the doctor said: "There is just this little matter about which I suggest that you should see Dr. Bond. We are very particular you know, and if I have the least doubt in the world, I like to refer to a specialist."

"Anything serious, do you think?"

"Oh! no, no, don't think so for a moment. You're all right, I dare say. No cause for anxiety. If I may say so, you are almost too conscientious. Your symptoms seem to be innumerable. Plainly most of them are nothing, point to nothing. Still, if as you say—I think it will be more satisfactory to both of us. The initial stages of some diseases are difficult to detect, unless one has a very special experience. Oh! you're all right."

Searle walked slowly back to his office. He finished his day's work with something of a mechanical accuracy, while the undercurrent of his mind was busy with this new source of uneasiness—of apprehension. He told himself

that there was really no cause for anxiety ; that at least it was folly to anticipate it. He had been told that the Company to which he had applied was notorious for its care in selecting clients, and he recalled the doctor's hint that his elaborate description of symptoms, more or less imaginary, might be considered a folly by any less scrupulous applicant for insurance. These considerations possessed his mind with less coherence and definiteness than they are here set down, but with the reiteration of an irregular pulsation. At last he put down his pen, leant back in his chair, and determined to think of the matter plainly.

Then, strange to say, his mind refused the coercion, and strayed back to early boyish days. He saw again the haggard sallow face of his father watching him with a kind of pitying irony. A faint taste of old boyish impulses came to him, only to be overpowered by this stifling antidote. Capriciously he passed then to his sister's funeral. He recalled a suburban churchyard, the harsh, business-like tones of the clergyman, his subsequent official sympathy, a chance conversation between the sexton and the gravedigger, appealing to a frozen sense of humour.

When his clerk entered, and with decorous preamble mentioned the news of the death of a client, Searle burst into a laugh!

“‘Out on ye, owls, nothing but songs of death,’” he cried, as the startled clerk withdrew.

He looked at his watch, put on his hat, and went into the outer office. “Brown,” he said, “I am very much distressed—very sorry indeed to hear this.” He shook his head gravely and left the office. Then he hesitated, thinking of the possible distraction of a theatre, but turned towards the station, as he remembered that on this night no late train would serve him.

It was raining, and as he walked under his umbrella he wondered whether he should ever be happy again. It was inconceivable, but no less so, that the sun would ever shine again. On the platform he encountered Mrs. Brayshaw. He greeted her with something like gaiety, and they got into a carriage together. He felt now in extraordinarily high spirits; his late depression seemed ridiculously unfounded. Nevertheless it had done him a service; it had impelled him to the frank seizure of this opportunity. He talked to Mrs. Brayshaw with animation, with something of brilliance. Ursula seemed very far

away. A passing image of her slightly checked the current of his spirits; she seemed to represent something sterner and harder than this irresponsible pleasure of the moment. As they neared Darley, he found himself regretting that the journey was over. He looked forward now with dull dismay to his solitary evening. Looking up, he met Mrs. Brayshaw's questioning eyes. She said in an even tone, "Will you dine with me this evening?"

He hardly hesitated in his acceptance. A load seemed to be lifted from his mind, leaving him a little dazed and giddy.

"Don't trouble to dress," she said; but added: "Yes, oh yes, do."

He set out that evening in a condition of strange excitement, immensely relieved to escape from himself for a few hours. In place of an evening of dismal or tedious reflections, he had the prospect of a *tête-à-tête* with a brilliant and beautiful woman. He assumed that he would be the only guest; curiously, it did not cross his mind that there might possibly be others. This happy and timely distraction intoxicated him; he felt a kind of gratitude for it, in conception perhaps not very different from what might be

felt towards the bestower of any timely favour, but gratitude to a woman takes colour from her rather than from her service. His thoughts of Ursula were cold and vague. To her the wisdom and serenity of his nature would turn, but now he could not but associate her with that strange dying woman and with images and ideas from which he shrank. There are times when a man who loves deeply finds in his love neither satisfaction nor solace. The Ursula of the happy summer days had gone, and her image seemed to bring with it austerity and repression. To-night he had a passionate craving for the garishness of life. As to menaces of death he had, he felt, reserves of endurance and dignity to support even that. But how ridiculous to attach any weight to the doctor's words. Decidedly, he told himself, the interview had been reassuring, and he dismissed it from his mind, remaining conscious henceforth only of something vague and dark outside.

He looked forward eagerly to the well-lighted luxurious room, to the froth of conversation, to the woman's bodily presence. Drawn by obscure sexual emotions, a man of chaste habit can hardly measure the forces that move him. He is em-

barked upon an unknown stream and floats towards rapids whose suddenness and strength may betray him. There are many good fellows in the world, but few who consciously attempt to purify their emotions, for if there be such an one he is called a prig, and denied the sense of humour. The average man, and even he who is far beyond the ruck, shrinks with a foolish diffidence from taking himself too seriously, from the strenuous guarding of his soul's health. Searle had a moment's surprise to find Mrs. Brayshaw in an elaborate dinner dress. She had, indeed, considered and braved the possibility of his initial disapproval, but he thought her radiantly beautiful. She wondered if his keen glance could detect the rouge with which, against her custom, she had subdued this night's excessive pallor. She had no defined intention, but a vague hope, a fearful apprehension, an almost frantic courage. A baseness is not readily formulated by the mind. It may be easy to act what it would be intolerable to put into words. They passed almost at once to the dining room.

"How can I thank you," said Searle, "for saving me from an evening of the blue devils?"

"So that was your prospect. Indeed I thought

so ; yet my motive was selfish. Blue devils ! Mine are not even blue ; they are brown, drab, everthing that is dull."

"And here we are, and they are excluded, dissipated, non-existent."

"Ah ! but they'll crowd in to-morrow."

"There's the mistake. It's all yesterday and to-morrow ; recollections, anticipations.

"Come fill the Cup, and in the fire of Spring
Your Winter-garment of Repentance fling ;
The Bird of Time has but a little way
To flutter—and the Bird is on the Wing."

"Yes, yes," she said. "That's philosophy. Who said it ? Pity my ignorance."

"An old Persian poet."

"It's a long way from Darley to Persia,"

"It's a long way from here to Darley."

"I wish it were."

"It's just as far as you like to think."

"Well, then, I'll have Darley at an eternal distance." He waved his hand.

"But now—" She stopped.

"Now ?"

"You will be here ?"

"Yes, for the eternal moment."

"Ah ! no, you are not here unreservedly.

You drink the wine with the thought of the morning's headache."

"You do your wine an injustice."

"Wine! Yet to some men wine is a temptation. And is there anything more hatefully modern than the substitution of whiskey and soda? Do you drink whiskey and soda?"

"No."

"I thought not."

"Why?"

She looked smilingly at him, and he basked in her look, wondering what it meant. She had had some half-formed idea of a compliment, and forgot it as she looked at him. The dishes passed rapidly, for he ate little and spasmodically, and she scarcely touched them. By accident they raised their glasses together, and he met her eyes, softened and alluring. She drank to him in dumb show, and he was aware of an ebbing of his strength. He tried to think, to recall himself. If he could for a moment fix his mind upon Ursula he would regain his self-command. As in a dream he was conscious of this, but her image eluded him; thought was impossible; his saving instincts were submerged.

"Yes," she said, musing, "you hark back,

you consider, you qualify ; you don't live your moment freely."

They passed to the drawing-room, where she held out a box of cigarettes. "You may smoke here," she said.

"Is it permitted ?"

"Never before. I'm old fashioned. I don't smoke myself. Don't hesitate. I don't like men to hesitate. I'll light it for you." She put it between her lips, lit it, and gave it to him. He met her eyes and a rush of blood to his heart swept him out of this fool's paradise. He saw where he was standing.

"Why are you so pale ?" she cried.

A faint sensation of horror and disgust contended with the fire in his blood. His sight was dim as she stood before him, her eyes dilated, her breast heaving. In a low tone she cried : "For God's sake go—leave me ! leave me !"

Mechanically he turned towards the door, but a sound that was at once a sob and a cry arrested him. Her body swayed as though she would have fallen, and he caught her in his arms.

When, at dawn, he left the house, the cool fresh air, the sober beauty of the twilight, struck

upon his senses like a deep remonstrance. He passed into a new world, and for the time, remorse was lost in amazement and incredulity.

Awake now, his mind suddenly clear and sane, it seemed impossible that what had passed could leave on him an indelible mark. Yet if his misery was the measure of calamity, there could be little hope. He turned to the south, projecting his imagination far over rolling fields and dark woods, now lightening in the coming day, to where Ursula lay sleeping. Sleeping or watching? Perhaps that night she had watched by the side of her friend, thinking of him. Through his deep pity, his terrified yearning, he felt yet that all could not be lost. If his mind was still untainted, she, above all women, could judge between an essential sin and a hideous accident. For was it not an accident? He shrank from recalling the steps of his decline; they were meaningless and inexplicable now; he could not realise them in cold blood.

He stumbled over a stone on the road, displacing it with a clatter that jarred upon the quiet morning. A thrill of apprehension went through him and instinctively he walked with

caution, almost on tiptoe. Recognising this, he had a bitter taste of his degradation.

“Irrevocable,” he muttered, but without conviction, using the word rather as a provocation to thought. But to think of Ursula seemed a kind of sacrilege. As to the other woman he had no clear conception. He shrank from an ungenerous judgment. He recalled, with a certain mental accuracy, unaided by the instinct of the moment, that she had had for him a certain charm, an interest as of something unexplained, a feminine mystery. Was the mystery solved in that she had avowed her love for him in utter abandonment? She had this justification. What was his? With no inclination to laughter, he saw the ludicrousness of it all. He had thought himself capable of refinements of morality, of watching for the insidious lapses of the mind; he had conceived of his life as a dedication. Now he had fallen into a temptation gross and obvious, a wickedness base and vulgar.

He let himself into the house with the care of a housebreaker, hating himself for it the while. Entering his room, he had a curious after-taste of his last sensations there. They seemed to him now like happiness. Sitting in his chair, he

looked at his watch, and, immediately forgetting what he had seen, he looked again. His scattered mind slowly realised that it had stopped, a simple circumstance in itself, but sufficient to mark and accentuate the term of a life that was worth the living. He sat dozing and shivering, the prospect of action, however trivial and necessary—the changing of his clothes, the vacation of his sitting-room for the housemaid's advent—intolerable to him.

Suddenly he was awake, and gazing at an envelope on his mantel-piece. It was dark in colour, and, in the half light, had not previously caught his eye. A telegram; it must have come immediately after he had left, and it had waited there for him all night. He seized it, welcoming this small distraction, and with something of the reserve of expectation which a telegram creates. The irony of circumstances provoked a laugh when he read: "All over here; shall see you on Thursday."

XII

URSULA RETURNS

THE pleasure of Ursula's return to Darley was tempered by Searle's mysterious silence. She was puzzled and distressed, fearing some physical or mental mishap. Nevertheless, the tradition of many happy home-comings, the expectation, and the curiosity that so largely qualified her anxiety, saved her from persistent forebodings. She had telegraphed to Searle in the morning, and as the train drew up to the platform, with the old familiar slackening and change of rumbling note, revealing well-known objects in the harmonious twilight, she looked out with a hope that was almost confidence. He was not there, but Mrs. Forwood helped her to alight, with many expressions of cordial welcome. Something in her voice warned Ursula that all was not well. There was a shade of commiseration in her greeting not characteristic of the good-hearted lady's every-day manner.

They walked up the hill together, Ursula in silence, while her friend was nervously voluble over casual news. At the cottage Ursula hastily kissed Betsy, and pushed her away towards the kitchen with an order for tea. She called out to her immediately as she took up a small pile of letters and notes to ask if there were no more, and then faced Mrs. Forwood, who took her hand and stroked and patted it in silence. The hand stiffened and clenched suddenly as it was withdrawn.

“What is it?” she said; adding, “Where is he?”

Mrs. Forwood hesitated no longer. “There are strange reports about,” she said.

“What kind of reports?”

“Scandalous—horrible.”

“Concerning whom?”

“They concern Mrs. Brayshaw”—Ursula started—“and Mr. Searle.”

“But what is this?” Her tone, so haughtily repellant, was a pathetic contrast to the hard facts presently narrated. Mrs. Forwood told her what she knew, concluding: “Of course these servants may be lying or mistaken, but—a place like this is Argus-eyed, and then there seems to

have been no slightest effort at concealment. I only tell you what I have heard. I don't ask you to believe it."

"I do not. Where is Harry?"

"I don't know, my dear. I am lost in all this. I know you, and I think I know that woman; but for him, what he is, what he means, is too much for me. I've no business in an imbroglio of this kind. I'm a mere china jug floating down among you brazen things—oh! not you, my dear, though you're too clever for me." Thus the poor lady, garrulous, but with an anxious eye on Ursula.

"But haven't you seen him? Haven't you told him? Where is he? What does it mean?"

"I have not seen him, but I wrote to him."

"He got it? He replied—"

"Nothing."

"Tell me this—have you any idea where he is, or whether he is in Darley?"

"I believe he is not here, but I found out that they expect him at the 'Boar' to-night."

"Good friend—what time?"

"The last train, I think."

Ursula took off her hat and looked round the room. She came to Mrs. Forwood and put

her arms about her. "Don't believe it," she said.

"I won't my dear."

"I had rather you said don't."

"I don't, my dear."

"Ah! you old liar," and she laughed and cried, and cheered up a little, and grew cold and hard, hating the suspense.

Presently she said: "I cried because I was nervous and excited. "I wouldn't have done it with anyone but you."

"Mrs. Forwood said: "No one's good enough for you. This Harry Searle—I speak of him at his best; as he is, I mean. Don't be vexed with me. Can you trust him—as you trust yourself?"

"Now, dear, it's difficult to explain. I would trust him. I do trust him, but I know that he is one that may be hard beset. He is not one of the smug elect. I know that. He is a man of possibilities."

"You're an honest girl. Possibilities? For a husband one wants certainties."

"Oh! no, it's not a bargain. 'Who chooseth me must give and hazard all he hath'; that's the true spirit of marriage. Of course there are

tame successes, and one hears of the golden wedding and the old people whose amity has never been ruffled by a word. Dull old wretches! Why, if you never quarrel, you can never make it up. If you are always content with your husband, he must be a dullard, who raises no expectations. Mr. Millington is safe. Would you have me marry a Mr. Millington? This is not much to the point, I daresay. Have you the exact time?"

"You are safe too, Peggy."

"Believe me, I have strain of wildness."

"It won't master you. You are the most trustworthy girl alive."

"Trust me, then."

"Ah! but you're too generous."

"Then these disgraceful rumours were believed? You believed them,—you know you did. You do. And that poor woman—you dislike her and would believe anything against her. She's terribly clever. She's dangerous to provoke, and splendidly unscrupulous. Is she at home?"

"I saw her this evening when I came to meet you. She seems to be always about the station when the trains come in."

“Does she know?”

“She’s inscrutable.”

Ursula drank her tea thirstily, with a half formed wish that she could have enjoyed Betsy’s tea-cake with a mind at ease. She sat down to her desk and wrote :

“My dearest Harry,—Come—come—come.

“Ever yours,

“URSULA.”

Now take this, dear, and get a boy to take it to the ‘Boar.’”

Mrs. Forwood took the letter and stopped to say :

“I’m the friend to come to, you know.”

“I shall come hundreds of times.”

“You may think me a giddy old person, but I can help those I love.”

Ursula put an arm round her neck and rubbed her cheek with her own, saying : “I don’t see what we want with men in this world at all.”

XIII

A TURMOIL

It was nearly twelve o'clock when Searle knocked at the door of the Red Cottage. Ursula opened to him, and as he stood motionless and silent she took his hand and drew him in. In the sitting room her terrible curiosity overpowered a faint delicacy of consideration, now hopelessly less than a generous confidence. She led him to the light, and looked steadily at his face. He did not meet her eyes, and she dropped his hand and sat down cowering over the fire.

"I tried to write," he said. "I tried to tell you. I couldn't frame the words. No words would make it intelligible. I didn't know what to do, but I felt I must come here to-night. It's true—I see you've heard it. It's true. It's a public scandal. There's nothing to say. There's no reason—no excuse—palliation. It's out-

rageous, incredible, impossible, but it's true. It's best to tell you plainly. I have anxiously desired this moment—that you should know it. Know the worst, because not till then can you begin again to—you see what we are—what I am—I've no right to class myself. I thought I was rather a good man. What can I do? I want to do what's best for you. I must go.”

“Stay.”

“Stay! but I can make it no better.” He knitted his brows, muttering, “If I could understand it—remember—my brain's going.”

“A friendship like ours cannot be broken.”

He stood considering this, with its many possibilities of meaning, its abstractness, its surprising liberality. There was no tenderness in her voice. It reminded him of a time early in their acquaintance. He answered in an even tone and with no very profound feeling:—

“Your generosity is misplaced.”

“Oh! don't think I take it lightly. Friends I said: the glory has gone. It is not for me to judge; I must first understand.”

He said: “There's another to consider.”

“Did she—?”

“The blame is mine.”

"We speak here of realities. No fantastic ideas of sham honour will do. She asked you to go there?"

"I suppose so. Ursula, there is only one reparation possible."

"Does she wish it?"

"I believe so."

"And you can make her a good husband?"

"God help us."

"Let me ask you this—she loves you?"

"Yes."

"She loves you—I loved you—is it the same thing?"

"I deserve whatever punishment you give."

"And she asked you to go there—casually? Was the black fit on?"

"Yes. I was very low. I was trying to do without you. And you—what have you passed through? I hardly dare look you in the face."

There was a knock at the door.

"So late!" said Ursula, and each saw the anticipation in the other's eyes. She went to the door and returned with Mrs. Brayshaw, who sat down with a glance at Searle.

"Why did you avoid me?"

“When?”

“Now, on the road; I went to meet the train.”

“I didn’t see you; I crossed the line.”

“Why are you here?”

They were silent.

“Why are you here?” she cried in a higher key. It was hardly anger; it was nearer to querulousness, and they recognised a third in their fellowship of misery. Ursula said:

“I sent for him. There is, as you know, an engagement between us. We were discussing it. We will defer this for the present.”

Searle crossed to where Mrs. Brayshaw sat. “Let us go,” he said. As she rose, he turned to Ursula and, holding her hand for a moment, stooped to kiss it. Mrs. Brayshaw cried: “Oh! it’s as good as a play.”

They stared at her, and she continued: “How you admire her—such magnanimity; I am proud to play even a small part in such company. By-the-bye, what is my part? It was not made quite clear.”

Searle hesitated in mere obscurity of mind. He looked at Ursula, who made no sign. His penitence and the woman’s misery moved him.

He said: "Will you do me the honour to marry me?"

She started and turned to Ursula, who sat reflecting deeply. "You are a better woman than I," she said; "I grant it the more readily as I care little for such goodness. To you, in your moral exaltation, it may seem strange that I cannot rise to the heights with you." She turned to Searle. "We might bandy you to and fro in a fervour of renunciation. I pain you? I miss the right note. The position is impossible; let us get it over. I want to say this to you, before her—my right is this—I love you more than she ever did or could."

Ursula said: "And how do you prove it?"

"I recognise nothing beyond him—"

"And I?"

"Oh!—God I suppose—the moral law—or the church catechism."

"And for him you would make any sacrifice?"

"Any but of himself. I did. I avow it without shame. I risked everything."

"Risked?"

"Why, what now? I say I gave—I sacrificed everything. Come, Harry. I am sorry, Ursula."

“You risked—what? Now I begin to see. Do you recall a conversation that we had the day I went away? Harry, when she asked you to go to see her that night, did you think you were visiting an innocent woman? You blame yourself—you are to blame, but the offence is not against her. You were gulled, man. You were entrapped. She risked everything—she played her last card. She loved you—call it love—and she had lost you. There was only one way—your honour, your pity,—my generosity too would be calculated on. A woman to admire. Oh! I admire you. A brilliant woman! A daring woman! Our poor little rules of conduct are not for you. How cold and close one feels by such a gambler. It’s not fair. These women have the great sensations.”

Mrs. Brayshaw had opened the door, but she sat down again, shuddering a little.

“Harry,” cried Ursula, laying a hand on his arm, “if this had been any poor village girl wronged by you, I would have said: ‘Marry her; let your life be an expiation,’ if such expiation were possible. I would have tried to love her. I would have stood her friend and yours. My love for you would not have been

less—another kind, a clearer strain. Now look at her. Try to consider her unimaginable baseness. She makes me hate myself. I cannot pity. Leave her; dismiss her; you are not bound; it was another woman that you took pity on; you didn't know her then."

Mrs. Brayshaw rose. "A remarkable tirade. Your audience is duly impressed. You follow, I think, the English sentimental method, and lose yourself in the part. You have forgotten your own effrontery. You talk of a trap—you who tricked him with the stale device of Platonic friendship. Truly, Harry, it's too bad; we make a shuttlecock of you. What can a man do between two shrewish women? No wonder you haven't spoken for half-an-hour. It must be disagreeable for you, but look at the honour of the thing." She passed out with a glance backward at him, saying: "Beware of the second thoughts of the magnanimous woman."

They stood silent for a few moments, till he raised his head impatiently. "I am very tired," he said; "it seems hardly an adequate thing to say, but I can't think clearly. I trust to you."

He sat down with his head in his hands, while she looked at him with close anxiety. He said:

"I'm afraid that woman will waylay me going down the hill." He spoke like a child. She could almost have laughed at him. He continued :

"I feel very queer, I must see that doctor.

"What doctor?"

"Oh ! a matter of form. I had to see a doctor ; it's about insurance. I wonder whether I am ill. I could unroll a whole series of sensations and symptoms, but I'm ashamed of them."

He rose to go, plainly disturbed at the probability of the meeting. He declined her offer to accompany him. In the full light of the lamp his extreme pallor and haggard looks startled her. "Don't let her keep you talking in the cold," she said, "and say to her what you have said now, that you can't think to-night ; don't commit yourself to anything."

He nodded and turned to the door, but as he looked back she came quickly to him and, putting her arms round him, kissed him on the lips. "To protect you against witches," she said.

Outside he was seized upon as he had anticipated. He was desperately eager to get away, to go home, to lie down to rest. Rest had been impossible for these last days, but now he

felt that he could sleep. And here was this woman pouring her tale of love and devotion into his ear. He hardly listened; he was conscious of the voice and of the desire to get away from it. It seemed that her cynical reserves had broken down, and he felt a vague pity; but the dreadful iteration of her voice hardened him. She had stopped him; they were not progressing down the hill. It seemed impossible, but he had a moment's amusement in the idea that she was offering him her horses and carriages; perhaps he had not quite grasped her meaning. It was all very curious, and became more and more like a dream. He thought that there was something fine in her appeal, in its frankness, its abandonment—an appeal at once to his senses, his compassion, his cupidity—for decidedly she threw her money into the scale, even to his imagination. The night was dark and the village silent as the grave. At the Red Cottage the light had disappeared from the sitting-room and now shone in Ursula's bedroom. Remembering her injunctions, he tried to move away, but his hands were caught in a close grasp. She was speaking to him, almost into his ear, in low, quick tones. His mind could not take her words but felt the

impress of her passionate misery. Environed by the blackness of the night, the world seemed contracted to the little turbulent space they filled. In his physical prostration, sick, cold, and exhausted, his mind was beyond the control of his will. Vague, terrifying images of death possessed him, making the woman's fulness of emotional life a strange impertinence. Again he caught the gleam of Ursula's light, and, rousing himself, he said: "I must go, I am ill." As he spoke they moved on, and a staggering gait confirmed his words. She spoke again, but her tone had changed. Her commiseration, her self-reproach, touched him. She, so complete in her worldly armour, showed now the strength of her common humanity in her apparent weakness. She spoke no further word on her own behalf, and left him at the door of the inn with reiterated injunctions for his care and comfort. Her torrent of words had left him merely distressed and bewildered, but the simple image of her walking home alone struck him with sharp pity.

Shivering with cold, he entered his room and brought out a bottle of old brandy, of which he drank two liqueur glasses in quick succession.

It stimulated him to some reflections on the immense waste of emotion in this world—a world of ill-fitting accidents accompanied by so prodigal a commentary. It is the privilege of failure and misery to philosophise, but it is a bastard philosophy that is not born of health and a quiet mind ; and the standards of health can be accepted in sickness only by the aid of discipline, that discipline which represses life only to give it freedom. To secure an economy of discipline should be the aim of life. From these abstractions his thoughts turned to Ursula, strong where he was weak, with generous pride, and his weary mind, preyed upon by anxiety and forebodings, rested there.

Ursula lay awake far into the night. For a long time her thoughts were no more than the recovery, bit by bit, of the acts and sensations of the evening. Over and over again, though in no sequence, these returned to her. They were dominated by Searle's face, and his expression, new to her and indefinable, filled her with commiseration and alarm. He had grown thinner since they had parted, but the physical change seemed the least of the deterioration, for she saw behind it the advance of the preoccupations she

dreaded. It is impossible to forgive the lover who is false and prosperous, and it is a low strain of love that withstands the destruction of its ideals, that becomes merely pitiful and helpful. Pride is the salt of such love as hers, and her pride had been coloured by a vanity that was near to a virtue. It was her thought that as love is, in great measure, discernment, it would have been impossible for another to see and to love as she. Her own self-respect came to his assistance. And this other woman loved him; what had they in common? Ursula was no child in knowledge of the world. Her early training had been, by modern standards, puritan, but her puritanism had been sweetened by a charity that was, like the best of charity, largely clearness of vision. There are concessions that degrade and concessions that liberalise. A girl who leaves the beaten track of English middle-class life must be prepared for the rapid assimilation of crude facts, but the world is beautiful and interesting, and the healthy mind gains from its beauties and interests a strength that no sheltered life can attain.

Ursula knew something of life, even of the degrading hubbub which, in contradistinction to

the depths of meditation and expression, usurps its name. She had maintained unscathed her ideals of a kindly reverence to the body, and she shrank from the thought of her lover's transgression. The bloom and freshness of life seemed to have departed, but even now she perceived that the hardly-won possessions of the spirit are not at the mercy of one unhappy mischance. Dimly, by perception and inference, she formed some idea of his temptation. She was a woman to feel the affront, but pity and commiseration worked with the pride of her ideality to efface it. The genesis of her love for Searle had given it much of the protecting, fostering quality ; something of her maternal instincts had been awakened. But in him she had seen, with a liberal and generous pride, a comrade trying to hold his own at a great disadvantage. Her sympathies could never have been aroused in the same quality and measure by a strong, sure man.

She believed in his essential nobility, and held to him by what was best in their common life—a mutual sympathy and a mutual respect, established to prevail over all accidents of the moment. Nevertheless, she was a woman cast in the com-

mon mould, and from thoughts too high and difficult she would fain have turned to the image of a gallant lover. Instead, she saw again his pale, sorrowful face, and sleep was farther from her than ever.

XIV

A SENTENCE

THE doctor had finished his examination and returned to his chair. He prepared to write, while Searle, adjusting his dress, watched him closely.

“It’s a serious matter, then,” he said.

“It is serious, Mr. Searle.”

“How soon shall I be right?”

The doctor looked up at him. “It is not easy to predict the precise course of the disease.”

“Weeks? Months?”

“I fear—”

“I mean, how long have I to live?”

The doctor gave a slight sigh of relief. “The condition is certainly one of extreme gravity.”

“Is it curable?”

“It is not generally considered so.”

“Do me the favour to be quite explicit. Do you think there is the faintest chance?”

“Of your ultimate recovery, I regret to say that I fear there is very little.”

“What’s the prescription for ? ”

“Mitigation—assuagement.”

“Have I”—he reflected for a moment ;—
“have I before me any considerable period before I—collapse ? ”

“Most probably. The nature of the disease is, unfortunately, apparent. It is not in an advanced, or at least not in a final stage.”

“Months ? Years ? ”

“Months, I should say, certainly ; not years.”

“Would a change of climate help me—Australia, Africa, or a high Swiss valley ? ”

“Except as affecting your general health, it could hardly make a difference.”

“An operation ? ”

“I should not recommend it.”

After a pause, Searle said : “Is it probable that medical science will ever find a cure for such a case as mine ? ”

“It is difficult to say. It cannot achieve impossibilities.”

“It appears to have a great respect for impossibilities.”

Dr. Bond shrugged his shoulders. Searle continued :

“Will you excuse my asking whether there is any chance of your being mistaken ? ”

“I can hold out no hope of it. For your own satisfaction it might be well to take further advice.”

“Oh ! damn it ! Give me a loophole.”

“I supposed that I was following your wish in—”

“Yes, yes—your pardon. I thank you for speaking plainly.”

Some conversation as to treatment followed, and Searle left the room and the house. It rained a little ; he had no umbrella, and as he walked up the quiet street towards the busier thoroughfare, he speculated on the effect upon his hat, and wondered whether it would last his time. He remembered the purchase of the hat ; his wish to economise had induced him to buy a cheaper one than usual, and the shopman had said in answer to his question as to durability :—
“Well, sir, of course it won’t last a lifetime.”

Now it seemed probable that it would last a lifetime. No—a lifetime meant the whole period between birth and death. Yet it would be absurd to think of a child with a man’s hat, so that when the shopman said a lifetime, he actually

meant the remainder of a lifetime. He took off the hat for a moment and looked at it. The rain drops made it look very shabby, and he experienced a slight relief at the thought that he would have to buy another before—. One more hat. Perhaps it need not be a silk hat; a soft felt would be more suitable for an invalid.

The triviality of these thoughts amazed him. He accused himself of cheap bravado, but he was aware of a turbulent undercurrent in his mind, and, by an instinct of self-control, he held the image of Ursula resolutely in the background. He recalled certain theories of sub-consciousness, and again the idea of a current brought back to him the rush of a stream and a place that he knew and loved in the Welsh hills. The waters flowed down a gorge and then emerged into the high valley, falling again in cascades and rapids to plunge at last into a deep and sombre pool beyond which his mind would not travel. Here was an analogy dimly perceived and abandoned. Blackness and bitterness possessed his heart, while his thoughts ran in unholy riot, like dancers at a funeral. Suddenly he turned up a little quiet court, and there, glancing round to see that he was unobserved, he stamped and shook his fist,

dashing it in impotent rage against the wall. Presently he emerged as he had gone in, a composed and serious gentleman.

Reason and even consecutive thought were at first impossible to him. Shreds of half-formed ideas broke across the background of his despair, like ragged clouds across the dome of night. There was a grim satisfaction at the fruition of bodings which seemed now to lose their colour of shame. He attempted, in a helpless, desultory way, to find some connection between the childish impressions which he had never quite effaced and this final process of disease. Physical connection there could be none, and now he felt little disposition to decline upon a mere superstition. Nevertheless that patient, reticent figure of his dying father, persisting through nearer and sharper sensations, seemed now, no less than ever, to take the colour out of his life. He was as an actor who might find many readings of his part, and here was one, a way of dying not altogether uncongenial; undemonstrative, unaffected, not without dignity. The idea of the actor considering his part clung to him; yet why a part? Here, if ever, simplicity, nature, were surely best. Yet his mind recoiled from

attempting to follow the course that with him might be called natural. What chaos of panic and surrender lay within the possibilities of his nature? No,—a choice must be made, an ideal set up and rigidly maintained. His thoughts were mainly selfish, and turned to Ursula now as to the helpmate who would make this residue of life possible. Yet, recalling her image for the first time unreservedly, his great commiseration surged within him, almost destroying his apparent equanimity. He caught the eye of a passer by, and regained his calm. The vanity of stoicism would be, after all, his safeguard. It is strange that we should be governed by opinions which we despise, conform to standards that we deny, acquiesce in customs that are to us unnatural. If it is in nature for the survivors to lament, what curious affectation compels the victim to composure? That convention of sentiment which makes death less terrible for the dying man than for the friends who survive him seemed now, more than ever, ludicrous to him; not the less in that he recalled instances in which the dying man, controlled by some illusive ecstasy, had ratified such a judgment. He thought now of Ursula with generous pride, her

interests so far-reaching, her sympathies so refined; the loss of him could not be irremediable; the last baseness of egoism was not his.

The rain had ceased, and the sun glittered over the wet town. Death seemed now not so much the great negation as an agony of renouncement, the surrender day by day of the treasures of sense and experience. The dingy, familiar streets, so long hateful or indifferent to him, seemed now infinitely interesting. An acquaintance nodded to him, a man whom he rarely saw and now might never see again. He turned to look after him, wishing that he had known him better, had cultivated him more; a possibility had gone. Yet with a revulsion of common sense he told himself that the man was little better than a fool, that they had nothing in common. Still he wished that he could have done him some kindness, that at least he had had more charity towards him.

He travelled out to Darley by his usual train, and did not even avoid his usual companions. They looked askance at him at first, but several of them seemed rather desirous to engage him in conversation. He found with satisfaction that he had little difficulty in striking the note of

cool indifference which, at this juncture, was his choice with these men—casual acquaintances become intimate through mere juxtaposition. Millington, who was of the company, did indeed maintain something of reserve, though it is probable that his fund of disapproval was severely taxed by his curiosity. The inhabitants of a suburban village, though they do not live in the fierce light that beats upon a throne, have a similar incentive to maintain the appearance of virtue. Searle knew that the men in the carriage were watching him, that they would discuss him when his back was turned, that his entrance had probably interrupted an interesting comparison of notes. Indeed many of his own remarks had been brought up against him, for he had not respected the conventions of his companions. It was remembered that he had said that it was part of a liberal education to read divorce cases, but that a taste for breach of promise shewed a debauched mind. It is in small matters like this that, as Millington said, a man's character reveals itself. As they drew near to Darley he forgot his companions, their attitudes, even their existences. An ordeal lay before him.

XV

AN IDLE CONFERENCE

AN impulse that she did not attempt to analyse urged Mrs. Brayshaw up the hill in the direction of the Red Cottage. She saw Ursula at the window, and the impulse developed, overcoming all contrary inclinations, and took her to the door. Ursula saw her approach and, after waiting for her knock, went out to open to her. Mrs. Brayshaw stood in the porch and as Ursula, without speaking, stood aside and opened wide the door, she passed into the house. There she sat down rather wearily and looked about her :—

“ You have a very nice room here.”

Ursula was silent.

“ An attractive room by lamplight. Why did I come? you would ask. I don't know, myself. I saw you there and the prospect even of your fierce righteousness seemed better than my own company. Then this is the centre of interest.

I felt that I must come. Oh! I've no plans—no purpose. I'm not dangerous, only desperate and tired. Pray don't regard this as an appeal. I trust that I am not pathetic. A certain unconsciousness is needed for pathos, and I analyse myself to death."

"You're too difficult for me."

"Yet last night you read a page and supplied a commentary. You have remarkable insight; don't you think so? That's what is said of women; they are quick to see a point, not often the whole; quick to judge, quick to condemn. You were right of course. I am an abandoned woman." She added softly: "Abandoned."

She continued:—"I might in a kind of way justify myself—account for myself at least;—not in cold blood. If I were roused to it—would you believe me capable of—eloquence? No doubt your reason would riddle it all, and then I am indifferent about it just now."

Ursula was intensely curious to know whether she had met him on the road the night before.

"How dreary it is. Even to sin is hardly an excitement. We are punished by ennui rather than by remorse. The thunderbolts of Jove, the wrath of Jehovah—where are they? One may

throw away one's soul, but where is the emotional equivalent? A nice phrase, isn't it?—emotional equivalent. But I suppose that the devil always got rather the better of the bargain. And you offered me your friendship. Remember that I didn't accept it. How curiously a little thing makes a momentous difference. Excuse these platitudes ”

She looked about the room again, languidly at first, but with an increasing interest. She examined the pictures and ornaments carefully. She got up to look over the titles of the books. “You will pardon me,” she said; “you have always interested me, and there is a great deal here that bears upon you. Unhappily, stupidly, I know little of all this except what I pick up by my smartness. I never study. I hardly ever read. My taste in pictures is very much less to me than my taste in dress. I go to the theatre, certainly, when I'm in London or Paris. That interests me,—yes, my impressions are deeper here; it comes nearer to a culture. I suppose you have a great deal in common here?”

“We have much in common.” She did not pretend to ignore the reference.

Mrs. Brayshaw turned upon her suddenly :—
“Well, what is to be done ? ”

Ursula looked at her steadily : “I think that you had better go away.”

“Leave Darley ? ”

“Yes.”

“I must give him up ? ”

“Yes.”

“And you will marry him ? ”

“If he will.”

“And if I don’t go—if—”

“I don’t fully understand you,” said Ursula.
“You know that all question of marriage between you and him is over. You may cause him—and me—infinite distress, I acknowledge that. I repeat that I don’t understand you. I don’t know why you came here to-day.”

“I rather think it was to kill time. You make the mistake of insisting on an adequate motive. At present I am motiveless. Strange to say I am not even malignant. I can’t think why it is that I don’t hate you. To-day I don’t. I had a shock last night, I’m rather anxious. Yes, I’ll tell you.”

“What is it ? ”

“I fear that he is ill.”

“Do you know it?”

“After I left here last night I waited for him. I had something to say. I found that he was not listening to me—he was very strange, and seemed weak and ill. It gave me a shock. I can’t help thinking of it. However, he went by his usual train this morning. I thought he looked very pale.”

“You were there?”

“He did not see me.”

“You don’t forget that he has had some mental distress.”

“I am not likely to forget it. I hope it’s nothing more.”

Mrs. Brayshaw rose, and they looked into one another’s eyes for a moment. Then she bowed and turned to go. To her own astonishment, Ursula said: “Will you stay and have some tea?”

She stood reflecting: “Do you desire it?”

Ursula, too, considered: “Yes, I almost think I do.”

“Is this charity?”

“I don’t know.”

Mrs. Brayshaw sat down, unbuttoning her gloves. Ursula regarded her with a curious

interest, asking herself why she desired her company. The firm maturity of her beauty seemed unclouded till Ursula again met her eyes, which were a little sad, a little weary. She had sunk back in her chair, and sat staring blankly through the window. Against her will, Ursula felt the tide of sympathy and friendliness stir within her.

A visitor was suddenly announced—Miss Pope—and Miss Pope entered with her best manner slightly marred by nervousness, for she was impelled by a curiosity that would not let her rest. Her curiosity had even fortified her against the possible resentment of the formidable Miss Harland. She started on seeing Mrs. Brayshaw, and was plainly bewildered. She rallied, however, and, having seated herself with her back to a small cast of Michael Angelo's Slave, which ruffled her sense of propriety, she began to talk of Zenana Missions, usually a safe subject in Darley circles. Ursula asked her if she had read "Bleak House," and as she had not, recommended it for throwing an interesting light on missions, whether Zenana or not, she was not quite sure. Miss Pope received the suggestion graciously, and, perceiving that literature offered an opening,

declared a preference for the Scotch stories of Mr. MacTaggart. Glancing at the book-shelves, she said: "Milton, too, is very fine," at which Ursula laughed frankly. Miss Pope hastened to the safer ground of social engagements, asking Ursula whether she was going to the Millington's on Tuesday. She kept an eye on Mrs. Brayshaw, for Mrs. Millington had mentioned confidentially that Mrs. Brayshaw had accepted her invitation a fortnight ago, and whether she would go, and, if so, what should be done, had been matter of anxious surmise. Ursula's answer was in the negative, and Mrs. Brayshaw made no sign. Then Miss Pope turned boldly to her and said, "Are you going?" Mrs. Brayshaw stared at her without reply.

To Ursula it seemed that this stupid, irreproachable young woman, virtuous by the standards of her class, threw into relief the distinction of Mrs. Brayshaw's bearing. It is difficult to separate accurately an artistic appreciation from a moral judgment. Ursula had no illusions about the value of the morality of the average conventional young woman. Her church going, her almsgiving, her chastity, are matters of custom; sin is a great departure from custom.

Far above these paragons of etiquette, Ursula could respect the woman who preserved something of the individual spirit in the wreck of sense. And even what seemed to her ugly and terrible in her rival was qualified by its audacity, by the courage that gave her something like a nobility of evil. A great crime may be forgiven, and, indeed, it has not the deteriorating force of the accumulations of petty meannesses. Of all courses, the line of least resistance is the most ignoble.

Miss Pope had provoked something of a reaction, and, after her departure, Ursula and Mrs. Brayshaw stood together at a window that commanded the road from the village. A train had just come in, and several people turned up the hill. Presently Searle appeared, walking slowly and alone. Mrs. Brayshaw turned to go, but stopped to watch his progress. He seemed to stoop a little; his eyes were on the ground, and he advanced as a man reluctant but compelled. With her eyes upon him, she said: "I have determined to leave here to-morrow. You may, if you please, interpret this as a surrender."

Ursula replied: "I should be more likely to interpret it as a victory."

"Pray understand that I act upon selfish considerations. I bear you no malice, and, as I am hopelessly in the wrong, this is magnanimous. I am not yielding to you."

"That is understood."

"I don't make myself clear, but it doesn't matter; these explanations are useless and absurd."

She hurried out. Searle had nearly reached the cottage. She bowed to him in passing, and turned to look after him as he unlatched the gate.

He had thought of concealment from Ursula for a few days, but now he felt it to be impossible. As he mounted the hill, he had considered a form of words, a method of announcement, but his mind was a blur as she met him at the door. She glanced at him with a confused dread, and they went in together. He gained his self-command, and as he took her hands they looked at one another.

He said: "I want your help."

She knew that some fresh calamity was upon them.

"I went to see that doctor to-day. I'm ill."

"Not very ill."

"For the moment, not very ill."

"It cannot be serious. You'll soon be better. You'll get well."

He was silent. She looked away from him.

"It cannot be serious," she said, "you'll get well. What is it? No, stop, don't speak. Yes, you'll soon be all right again. How you alarmed me!"

She broke from him and hid her face in the cushions on the couch. He knelt beside her and put his arms round her. She was trembling.

"How you alarmed me!" she cried.

Several minutes passed.

"Now," she said.

"You know it."

"Speak plainly."

"I shall not get well. I have months before me—perhaps more—years."

She drew in her breath and turned to look at him: "A brave man," she said, and took his hand and kissed it. He flushed with pleasure. "With your help," he said. She lay quietly, holding his hand. Her eyes strayed round the room, fixing themselves, from time to time, on some well-known object as she strove through it to regain her normal consciousness. She asked him to tell her all about it, but her voice faltered,

and she was shaken by a paroxysm of sobs. She quelled it at once and listened to his narrative calmly, questioning him quickly from time to time. At the end she said: "We'll see another doctor or two."

"Yes, but it's no good."

"Then we must make the best of what we have."

XVI

A FAREWELL WITH A RESERVATION

Two days later Searle received a message through Ursula that Mrs. Brayshaw wished to see him before she went away.

“She knows?” he said.

“Yes. I went to see her.”

To his enquiring look she replied: “She heard it with perfect gravity. She might have known it; she was not strange and daring in her speech to-day. I thought her unlike herself; more human. Doesn’t it seem to you that our individualities are something very superficial, that we have the essential things in common?”

“I don’t like the idea.”

“Well, I think I am very like any common and stupid woman; a little more strenuous, that’s all. I get out of myself, but I sink back.”

“Yes, we tend to the same point as our faculties decay.” Her heart contracted as she resolved to be more careful in her speech.

He set out on the grey autumn afternoon with little liking for the task, indifferent rather than repelled. The village, the landscape, the whole aspect of things seemed curiously uninteresting,—curiously, for it occurred to him that he might have expected that passionate fervour of appreciation that often taunts the condemned man. Yet it was only what he had before him that seemed void, spiritless ; he felt within the craving for a life richer and fuller than he had ever known. He entered Mrs. Brayshaw's garden with no stronger feeling than a sad distaste, a weariness at the prospect of the vain revival of emotions that had lost their savour.

He was shewn into a small room that he had not seen before, and sat down in dull acquiescence before a bright fire, the cheering warmth of which, as he noted with faint amusement, quickened his faculties and even raised his spirits. Mrs. Brayshaw, entering almost immediately, drove away this languid introspection. They shook hands silently and sat down half facing one another. He admired her bearing, and dismissed a half-formed thought, provoked partly by her subtle attraction, that after all this woman of imperfections and incongruities might have

matched him better than the terribly complete Ursula. He hardly knew what to say or to do. His own thoughts of her, and even his judgments, were vague and unsure, and he winced as the confusion of his mind suggested to him that disintegration of the faculties which is the peculiar humiliation of death. He followed his most generous instincts, and in what he said there was no shadow of reproach. She, too, was grateful that he spared her the extremes of his abasement. For a moment she wondered what this scene might have been but for the overpowering anticipation which drained it of its passion.

“What is past, is past,” she said.

“And between us there is no future.”

Her eyes suddenly filled with tears, and he felt the crudity of his speech, but he had dreaded misconception, and felt himself unequal to the refinements of sentimental colloquy.

“Between us,” she repeated. “Well, I am not jealous now. I am hardly jealous. It is all too serious and terrible. To help you—that is what I wish. I can’t be unselfish : I want to help—I—not another. All I have is yours. I’m rich. Don’t refuse.”

“I have enough money.”

She made a curious proposal—that he should accept her money to use “wisely ;” for philanthropic objects if he pleased. Recollecting some chance remark of his, she suggested the encouragement of young painters ; literary men ; or he could make a present to Ursula : desperate attempts to curry favour with him.

“A present ?” he said. “You mean a legacy.”

“I wish I were not rich,” she said. “Had I been poor, you would have been sorry for me. I don’t want your pity. If Ursula Harland had not been here, I might have been a good woman.”

“How so ? ”

“I’ve had impulses and ideas in my time, more than you know of. When my husband died, and I was free, I seemed to have a chance, an opportunity. Such little things determine it. Ursula had just come here. I hated to be like her. I couldn’t see a better way of being good than hers ; and she roused my opposition. So I remained idle and capricious. It’s a lame tale. I know that. I wanted an object—Inspiration, aspiration.”

Fearing a flow of emotion, he rose, anxious to end a scene that he felt to be useless and ill-

timed, but he hesitated, seeing the dread in her eyes.

“We shall see one another again ;” he said.

“Must I go ?”

“I think it is best.”

“You don’t pity me.”

He was on the edge of sentiment, but a brutal plainness prevailed. “Pity you ? Oh, yes ; but your case is not so hard. I can’t pity anyone much except myself. My eyes are jaundiced, or suddenly clear. I don’t know which, and life seems mainly a matter of health and years to live. You have many years, I hope, after this episode is closed.”

“I suppose it is disagreeable to you to see me ?”

“Pray don’t think so.”

“When you proposed to marry me, it was a matter of duty ?”

“I conceived it as a duty ; yes.” He added. “I can believe that I should have been rewarded.”

“And now you don’t want me ? You wish to be with her alone ?”

“I have a particular task before me.”

“A task ? What is it ?”

“To die gracefully ; call it gracefully.”

“And I should be a baneful influence?”

“An influence.”

“I don’t understand. I think you want variety, interests, amusement.”

“Yes; you represent much that it’s very hard to leave.”

“Then why leave it?”

“I tell you that I have a particular task.”

She regained something of her old manner. “I begin to see. This is something beyond my scope—something very high and dry; spiritual exaltation, or what do you call it? Ah! how hard and cold it will be.”

Searle had a dim and far away recollection of a weakly little boy and his nurses, and particularly of one who would never allow him to cry. He remembered her the best, but he had not loved her. Did Ursula represent something hard and cold? He seemed to be leaving the warmth and colour of life behind him. With this woman he conceived vaguely a less inflexible standard, an easier descent. It presented itself as a temptation, but it was an attenuated temptation, little more than the arrest of an idea.

He hesitated, trifling with his hat; unwilling to go, unwilling to remain. Now her silence

oppressed him. He could better have borne a torrent of words. Silence is hard to answer, for it stands for all the possibilities of speech.

She waited for him to go, yet he felt that to leave her was like striking the defenceless. He realised that, during these last days, he had thought little of her and of his relation to her. Without condemning her formally, he seemed, since the night at Ursula's cottage, to have shifted from his shoulders a great load of responsibility, or was it—the point was a curious one—that this newer and great burden had obliterated the other? Here, in her presence, spurred by no resentment, controlled by the influences of the moment, it was impossible to judge, to condemn. He glanced round the room, and out of the window, speculating as to her occupation after he had gone. It was a pretty little room, but there was no help there, and out of doors the grey, drooping afternoon was one to draw back an introspective mind upon itself. The sympathy that does sometimes prevail over our egoism gave him a sudden insight. He seemed to live her life, to think her thoughts. The bareness and loneliness of it smote his heart to an intimate sadness. Evil and sin, exaltation and

righteousness seemed small matters. He was possessed by a sense of the perpetual contraction of life, its constant re-assertion of ultimate tendencies, the inevitable fall from each up-springing ; all the great preliminaries of death. It was no longer a selfish feeling, and as he stood there he felt, as he had never felt before, the pressure of a common life, a common fate. For the moment it overcame the small distinctions in length of life, and his own particular ill was merged in the general stock. Soon his selfish consciousness returned, and with it the thought of her as a possible resource. He was startled at last by the long silence, and looked up quickly to meet her curious regard.

“I suppose I am outside all that,” she said.

“I was thinking of you.”

“I don’t bring happy thoughts.”

“We are about to part.”

A deep flush overspread her face, and her voice took a joyous inflection : “I don’t want to go.”

How easily, how fatally, he thought, emotional scenes with a woman tend to one end. Even now it seemed that he might decline into the language of a lover.

Such a reflection begets common sense. He

took her hand, and disregarding a little start and gasp, he said in firm, measured tones : "Good bye, now ; you had better go for a time ; I shall look forward to seeing you again."

"I will do as you wish." She stopped, and looking at him with a shadow of triumph in her eyes, added : "as you tell me."

"It is better so," and though he reproached himself for it, he felt forced to add to her poor strain of happiness : "Just now I must not be excited."

She held his hand as he would have turned to go. He was embarrassed, but fully master of himself. He touched her head, and drawing it towards him, lightly kissed her forehead. He felt a touch of insincerity in the action ; almost a touch of ludicrousness, and a few moments later he breathed the open air with relief.

Nevertheless, the agitation of his emotion had its element of pleasure. He set his face for Ursula's cottage, anxious for the safety and peace that he should find there ; but with the thought that here was another resource, or at least another interest.

XVII

THE WORLD IS NOT THY FRIEND, NOR THE WORLD'S LAW.

THERE is a satisfaction, a feeling of completeness, in the final settlement of affairs made by a dying man. The things of this world are usually such loose ends, so changeable, relative, connected, that it rarely happens that one may say :—
“This page is turned, this account closed.”
Searle had his will signed and sealed, his papers arranged, his final depositions made, and he breathed more freely, though with a curious feeling of detachment, of emptiness. It was as though he had made all preparations for a journey, had strapped his bag, had buttoned his coat, and then had found that it was too early to start. He felt almost elated at quitting his office, representative as it was of so much that was uncongenial to him, and though he parted with much

goodwill from his sympathetic partners, to whom he had given a slightly watered-down version of the gravity of his case, he felt some relief in avoiding the extremity of their commiseration. Henceforth his life—that small fag end of life in which the essence of all that was past was gathered—must be truly eclectic. His impulse towards literary ambition was repressed, wisely repressed as he was sure, remembering Ursula's part in the determination. The toil and harassment of a new literary venture, the consummation of which he could hardly experience, had seemed to them, in their grave consideration of policy, to promise less of recreation than the incursion together into chosen regions of imagination. They proposed to read poetry together, a means to the spiritual union of noble minds. His contracting life had yet the prospect of serene and happy days, for even with the blow that had fallen upon him he seemed to have gained this partial assuagement—that it was sometimes possible to contain himself within a span of time, to take no thought for the morrow, to live freely in the moment. Yet on this day, with an almost joyous anticipation of his freedom, and with a confidence in himself that was indeed the

measure of his devotion to Ursula, he felt more strongly than before the wish for a safe-guard, a last resource, a possible refuge from the final wreck. It had struck him as a grave irony that he, of all men, should be put to this trial of a gradual dissolution. Death was to be his daily companion, a companion that will not brook familiarity, that becomes stranger to us as we see him near at hand.

In arranging and destroying his papers, Searle had come across a letter from an old schoolmate, a man of parts but a failure, now, if he was to be believed, in circumstances little short of desperate. He had been a doctor, and still practised in Manchester in some obscure manner ; if Searle's information was correct, as the assistant of an unqualified man, an arrangement useful to evade the law. Searle had supplied him once or twice with small sums of money, but to his most recent and pressing demand had made no reply. The address upon the letter, most carefully written according to the custom of the begging letter writer, was Arthur Kirke, M.D., 12, Merton Street, Great John Street, Hulme. Searle looked at it with a curious half-formed intention, an intention that seemed alternately

forethoughtful and fantastic, and again fascinating and repellant.

He left the office barely in time to catch an afternoon train to Darley, and hailed a hansom. The driver asked twice for his destination and peered curiously down upon him. Then Searle said, with measured exactness, "12, Merton Street, Great John Street, Hulme."

He had the fortune to find his friend at home in a dingy parlour, drinking whiskey from a teacup and smoking very bad tobacco. He entered the room with unexpected suddenness, tripping over a rent in the carpet and plunging almost into the arms of Mr. Kirke, who removed his pipe and cried: "Always run to relieve a friend."

The afternoon was young, but Kirke was already pretty drunk, and the expedition began to seem very nauseous to Searle. Kirke's face struck him to sudden misery, and his reception, in which dignity and facetiousness were mingled, irritated him beyond measure.

"Glad to see you, Searle," said Kirke, "make yourself at home. Join me in a little afternoon tea? Yes. I take a little whiskey in it—stomachic. It looks better in a cup if anyone comes in. There used to be a piece of bread

and butter on a plate, but it seems to have been lost. Sit down. It's filthy whiskey and this is mere shag. It's disagreeable to have to go to the devil in such poor style. Well, you got my letter. It's all lies of course; you can see that. I'm not a deserving case—no—but I say emphatically,"—he banged his fist on the table—"I say that a man of refinement like myself—refinement, Searle—do yourself justice in doing me justice—essential refinement I say—damn it, I've forgotten my point;—no, what I want to say is this,—nothing can stop me, understand that—I say that a gentleman should be permitted to kill himself on better stuff than this." He grimaced as he drained the cup.

"Then why don't you get better stuff?"

"I've no money. It's this fellow's tap; he keeps me. I cover him you know. He knows nothing of medicine, but he's a genius in affairs. I'm under his thumb—so he thinks, but I've warned him that unless this is altered"—he went to a cupboard, took out a bottle and refilled the cup. "I'm allowanced too," he said.

"You've forgotten the water."

"It's ready mixed," he answered gravely.

If this errand had seemed a doubtful one at

first, now it appeared as the extremity of folly. Nevertheless, Searle hesitated no longer. It was no case for reason; he had not insulted his reason by calling it in.

"I came here on a matter of business," he said.

"Business! That's good. What kind of business? Can't you see I'm drunk?"

"Yes, but you're better drunk for this."

The other stared at him.

"Kirke, drunk or sober, I believe you are a man of honour."

Kirke laughed. "Well," he said, "I havn't been reminded of it lately and had nearly forgotten. Have you come here to talk rot?"

"It's to the point. I want you to do something for me and to keep quiet about it."

The tea cup was still half full, and Kirke took it up and locked it in the cupboard.

"What's this?" he said.

"Ah! Kirke, I remember you had a touch of romance about you."

"What on earth—"

"Do you recall a summer afternoon? How many years ago is it? When we bathed in Gadsby's Reach, and then lay in the shade and

read bits of a story, turn about? What was the heroine's name? Dulcina? Elvira? Under the most distressing circumstances she was always perfectly calm."

"Ah! yes, she had a ring, with a pinch of poison in it. That was the worst that could happen to her."

"You remember it? I thought of it when I came across your letter again the other day."

"Touching, this. And where does the poisoned ring come in?"

"I want the nearest modern equivalent."

"I may be drunk, but I'm not mad."

"You know all about these drugs. I don't; I don't know what to ask for at the chemist's, nor what he could give me, nor how much to take. I consult you as an expert. Don't be alarmed. It would only be used on a remote contingency. The fact is—"

"Searle," he cried, pacing the room, "You horrify me, you terrify me. I thought I was as wretched as a man could be; but here's a lower deep. It sounds ridiculous for me to say it, but you shake my faith. Yes, my faith in the world. Oh! you may laugh at that. I'm down. I'm gone. Call it settled. But I'm not

such a cursed egoist as to suppose that I drag everything with me. But you—you're a clean man, you're above ground. Didn't I hear that you were to be married? A hitch? And a sentimental tragedy? You ought to know better. That sort of thing is out of date, and was always silly. What is it? You don't look well. I see that, but it's a fool's trick to throw up the sponge for a little insomnia, dyspepsia, whatever it is. No! No! Consult me. I'm sober enough now, thanks to you, and might earn a guinea honestly."

"No," said Searle. "It's as I tell you. I'm ill. I can't last long, and I'm doubtful whether I can hold out decently. Do you see? I can't trust myself; this will help me. I shan't use it unless at the last extremity."

"What is it? What's the matter with you?"

Searle told him; described his interview with Dr. Bond; showed a prescription and answered a few questions. The other shrugged his shoulders. "I'm sorry," he said. "I'm afraid you've got your passport. It's a pity, when a man has something to live for. It'll be an interesting race between us. I could certainly beat

you if I were not 'lowanced. But what's your idea? What are you afraid of? The pain? I don't quite see."

"Kirke, do you remember Phillips?"

"Phillips — Phillips — what, you mean at school?"

"Yes, well, a year or two ago Phillips and I did some climbing together. We were both novices and stupidly rash, and we got into a very tight place. Phillips looked round at me—he was up above, very pale—and he said, "It's not so much the getting killed. It's making such a damned fool of yourself."

"Oh! it's not death that you fear, but the fear of death. Very ingenious. The analogy is a little strained, perhaps, but I see your point. I don't like it; too much of the Family Herald about it for me."

He walked up and down the squalid little room in a deep reverie. His lips moved.

Searle caught the words—"My poverty, and not my will, consents"—and replied quickly:

"I pay thy poverty and not thy will."

"You mistake," said Kirke, turning sharply, "I was struck by an analogy. I take no pay for this."

"I need not tell you that there is no danger of your name being mentioned."

"I was not thinking of the danger."

"Kirke, there's many a worse man than you in purple and fine linen."

"Very original. In fact, I'm nobody's enemy but my own. Out with it."

"No, but I must claim my privilege."

"What privilege?"

"The dying man is allowed to use a few moral tags."

"He may claim to be left alone, too. You're not the only dying man."

"Oh! you fool! You're not dying. Your liver and lungs are all right. You've no hopeless disease. What more can a man wish for? What possible delirium of happiness can transcend that? Do you know what you lose? What life is? To have the chance of escape and not to take it! It's not madness. A madman's a sage and an archangel beside you."

"Yes, you nearly blunder on an idea there. It's curious and very interesting; the impulses of a madman, the acts of a madman—all without affectation mind you—and yet there presides over it all a sane intelligence, I may even say a critical

appreciation. I don't want to appear conceited, Searle, but if I had had a technique, a training in any art, I should have made my mark."

"Look here," said Searle, "take another chance. I'll make you an advance if you'll promise me to try again—to do your best. We'll get you out of this. Now I'm not thinking of what brought me here ; this is a separate affair, a matter of—well, let us say a matter of friendship."

"Whatever you gave me I should spend on whiskey. Damn you, leave me alone. Do you think I haven't tried? No disease, you say. My will's diseased, that's it. It's crumbled away, eaten up, rotten. A man's will becomes stronger or weaker ; it can't keep the same. Mine's weaker, and the little I have is turned round now and working for destruction. I'm not a man to do things by halves. Funny, isn't it, to find these little shreds of conceit. Oh ! it's interesting I can tell you. I'd keep sober to study myself drunk. By-the-bye, I don't like whiskey really, or strong drink of any kind. It's an habitual craving, that's all. I prefer milk. This bad whiskey I positively hate. Must have it though. Curious, isn't it? Excuse me ; I'm garrulous ;

it's a kind of old age—artificially produced. Yes, I see what you want. That came in well about the Apothecary and Romeo, didn't it? I always liked that bit. I must read Shakespeare again :—A Winter's Tale—Cymbeline—My God! I'd forgotten about Shakespeare."

He sat with drooping head, muttering.

"One thing, Kirke—I can't understand how you employ your mind."

"I don't employ it. You soon get accustomed to that. Of course I have something to do professionally—not much; he's jealous of my getting in. I sit here blinking for hours together. Well now, let's leave that. What you want is something strong and certain. I know the thing. I'm rather interested in poisons. Do you want to know what it is—its effect—that sort of thing?"

"I want to know only this—that so long as I can raise my hand to my mouth I have the power—"

Kirke had shambled out of the room and he returned presently with a small phial with a glass stopper. "I shouldn't be surprised if you never took it," he said. "You'll find that it's not so easy when it comes to the point. I think that

suicides are rather a dull set. They must have some will power left, too."

"Is this easily detected? Suppose I took it when I was already far gone, bedridden, weak, would a doctor find it out?"

"Well, some doctors are great fools."

Searle took the phial and regarded it curiously: "And the fee?" he said.

"I have already told you that there's no fee."

"I should like to do something for you."

"I wish you hadn't come. You bring the scent of the world with you. You stimulate my mind, and make me wish that I was something better than stinking carrion. Well, I live a simple life; it's reduced to its lowest expression—an appetite, a craving at least, and its indulgence. Now don't attempt to reason with me. You're really too old-fashioned. Can't you see how far gone I am? Poor devils in my plight used to delude themselves with hopes of amendment. I should insult myself as a man of science by anything of the kind. It's no use I tell you. I've gone through it all too often, and I won't try again. When a man's comfortably in hell, leave him there. To make hopeless sallies and be dragged back is worst of all."

“Remember this, I’ll help you if you come to me.”

“On second thoughts, perhaps you might like to send a gallon of whiskey, say a two-gallon jar addressed to me, Arthur Kirke, M.D., care of Mr. Peter Bailey, 12, Merton Street, Great John Street, Hulme ; but mind this, if you send it, it’s spontaneous, it’s not in return for a service. Have you a turn for casuistry ?”

“I tell you what, come out with me to Darley, and we’ll have a week or two together and talk things over.”

“Would you let me get drunk every day and all day long ?”

“No.”

“Good day then.”

Searle held out his hand, but the other did not appear to see it and was already opening the cupboard.

On the way home Searle felt for the phial several times and handled it with a sense of security. It seemed to him that his spirits should have been dashed by such an interview, but he felt something of the mean relief of one who is surprised to find another lower than himself.

Whether to be pleased with his foresight or to curse himself as a fool he had not yet decided. It is impossible to escape tragedy, but man has himself to blame for the creation of melodrama. Nevertheless, the feeling of security was worth having.

XVIII

A CHECK

SEARLE felt a great relief for the first few days after definitely renouncing his life in Manchester. At the best that city is not greatly beloved by its sons. It is to them a means rather than an end. In its vast volume of life there is much of interest, something of beauty, but in the multitude of its details, as in its whole effect, it seems inexpressibly sordid and futile. Searle had often felt the repulsion from this great ignoble strife—a cruel war of mercenaries undignified by the tragic chances of a campaign. His profession had brought him into contact with much of the seamy side of commercial life, for even here it is possible to distinguish. In himself, as in others, he recognised something of a dual personality. He found varying degrees of roguery; even of cruelty, extortion, or baseness, co-existing with personal codes of honour. And there seemed to

be little in common between the acute lawyer, honourable within the prescribed limits, but of necessity callous and unkindly, and the man whom Ursula knew. At times, seated in his office, some outside thing had quite turned the current of his life ; as when he had seen some pigeon or stray crow flying high over chimneys and telephone wires towards its unknown bourn, or when a ray of sunlight had struck suddenly across a musty deed. Then he had yearned to be done with this perpetual grubbing in barren dust heaps, and had been, indeed, amazed at his patient endurance of anything less than the inevitable. Custom, inertia, and "that habit of middling actions which we call common sense," had prevented any rash departure.

But now, turning for ever from what had filled such a large space in his mind, he felt, with the relief, a lightness and emptiness, that, in its turn, became an oppression. This enormous change in his mental food came at a time when the digestion of his mind was disordered. Ursula saw with apprehension that his capacity for nature and art was not unlimited, though his love for them was genuine. Mere distraction was sometimes necessary, and she exerted herself

to comply with his mood, steadily directing and encouraging him, at all suitable times, to fix his mind on such abstractions as tend to fortitude or peace. She never affected to ignore his disease, nor pretended any vain hope of its removal. It was accepted as a matter to be taken into account.

To him it was an obligation of honour, as of gratitude and affection, to follow her lead. He knew the value of that tranquil aspect, more significant than any emotional display. When, occasionally, an irresistible impulse urged him to dwell on the future, the rigid repression of sentiment gave something of hardness to her tone, infinitely pathetic to him, but leading back, by consideration for her, to the safety of reticence. Yet this desperate strait did not find her deficient in *savoir vivre*. In the quiet little room, with a cheerful fire, the curtains drawn, and a book, through which they found much of discussion and communion, it seemed possible to accept a limitation of time as well as of space. The world was shut out from the happy hour as from the familiar room. Her heart rose with an amazing gaiety, a scarcely qualified delight. Much of her bearing towards him was consci-

ously histrionic, and again and again she had struck the right note with approving satisfaction ; but in these hours she entered with perfect fullness into her part. She overflowed with a caressing affection, an almost playful familiarity.

He, too, in the charm of her presence, with the vivid and changing interests that she awakened, the familiar encouragement of her voice, could sometimes accept the present without reservation. Yet he was conscious sometimes of a certain wariness even at her brightest ; nothing was unobserved, nothing was hidden from her. Frequently he dined or lunched with her, and he saw that all his slightest preferences were carefully noted. As he laughingly declared, he lived under strict surveillance, and she, blushing in some alarm, acknowledged it with an apology for clumsiness. "The policeman should keep out of sight," she said.

"Oh, but you're a wonder. I could trace your hand in everything if my perceptions were fine enough. You surround me with an intricate network. You do everything but the impossible."

"I fear that it oppresses you."

"No ; I want you ; nothing but you ; you in everything. I think of you when I lie down at

night ; I think of you the moment I awake ; I like to know that you have chosen the meat I eat ; I don't want to read a book unless you too read it. It's like the ideal of Christ—that beautiful ideal of a friend always at hand. I have sometimes wished to be a Christian, do you know ? But Christ always seems remote and doubtful, and then one's reason and self-respect go hand in hand.”

“I like the Christian religion when it is simple and homely.”

“There are beautiful ideas in it.”

“Beautiful ideas abound in any large human tradition, I suppose.”

“It must rest at last on its poetry.”

“I think I might incline to it as a reaction from the crudely modern.”

“All great ideas and performances have once been crudely modern.”

“Performances perhaps,” she murmured, “but ideas ? Does the poem evolve to perfection through roughness always ?”

“The evolution of the poem begins before the individual who writes it.”

She looked at him with a steadfast gravity :—
“One conceives a strain of immortality.”

“Yes, I sometimes think that this craving for a future of our own is veritably the ‘last infirmity of noble mind.’”

“The present, the present is enough.”

“Let us eat and drink for to-morrow—”

“You must not break through the network.”

“I can look into the abyss while you hold my hand.”

“It is best to live and to forget.”

“And when one can’t forget, one must organise—refine.” He waved his hand, dismissing the subject almost cavalierly; the activity of his mind had subdued the weight of the burden.

So she ventured to skirt the subject with him experimentally, hoping to strengthen him by the accumulation of grave thoughts and by the habit of composure. Away from her he felt like a rudderless ship, impelled in the right course but veering with chance winds. He avoided all intercourse with his acquaintances, evading their enquiries with polite reticence. His illness was a matter of common report, but the degree of its seriousness and even its precise nature were variously discussed. Commiseration was qualified by disapproval, for man is by nature sympathetic and resents the restraint of his best impulses.

Besides, the circumstances of the case were so extraordinary, and interest was so baffled by the silence of the actors, that Darley society was racked by an extreme exasperation. Mrs. Brayshaw had first become petrified and had then departed, and no cajoleries or taunts could affect the staunchness of Mrs. Forwood, who replied to enquiries readily, but with palpable falsehood and the frankest inconsistency. Miss Pope had ventured to accost Ursula with direct and pointed questions, and had been met with silence qualified later by irrelevant remark. Perhaps this reticence was unwise, but Ursula dreaded the flood of officious and shallow sympathy no less than its deeper and sincere manifestations. She lived under the burden of a great undertaking, and all interruptions or diversions must weaken or embarrass.

Nevertheless the efficacy, or at least the sufficiency, of her methods grew doubtful to her. She saw her lover daily rise to animation in her presence, but, as she feared, from a gloom that daily grew deeper. She had suggested to him that they should leave Darley for a time, but he was reluctant to go, reluctant, as with a sorrowful heart she saw, to close one of the few episodes that remained to him.

She had parted from him one afternoon in mid-October with the understanding that he was to return to share her evening meal as usual. The time came and passed, but he did not arrive. She waited for half an hour before sending Betsy with a note asking for the reason of the delay. The reply was written in pencil across her own note :—" I beg you to excuse me."

She reflected for five minutes upon this before putting on hat and cloak. She told Betsy to keep the dinner warm, and set off quickly down the hill. Nearing the Boar her step became slower ; she wished that it were further away, but she continued doggedly to approach it. Entering, she found herself in some confusion of hurrying to and fro, of lights, of loungers in loud talk, hushed at her advent. Under curious eyes she advanced to the open window of the bar, through which she had a momentary recognition of certain village worthies strangely revealed in a new capacity. She asked for a direction to Searle's room, while several men, who stood aside to allow her to approach, listened greedily. A maid was summoned and dispatched with her, and, dismissing her with a smile, Ursula found herself before a door conspicuously labelled

"Private." She knocked gently with her knuckles and entered.

He had not heard her, and as she advanced quietly to where he crouched before the fire, he did not turn his head. Kneeling quickly beside him, her arm was about his shoulders as he turned with a gasp of surprise that was very like a sob. He clutched at her hand and held it firmly. At last she rose, saying: "Come." He shook his head a little as he buried it in his hands. She looked about her. "How curious it is that I should never before have seen your room." She examined his books and made some remarks upon them, and presently had the satisfaction to see that he was listening. A man's own books are so interesting to him. A slight exclamation made him turn round. She had taken down an engraving from its nail.

"What is this?"

"An old German thing,—a Dance of Death."

She smashed the glass on a chair, dragged out the picture, and stuffed it into the fire, saying: "The frame will be useful again."

"My dear girl," he said, with asperity, "do you know that that's a valuable engraving?"

She looked at him with mock solicitude!

“You shall have another picture. I’ll paint you something.”

He pointed to the fire. “Where is it?” he said. “That picture hung in my room a few minutes ago; it had certain qualities, forces, refinements, associations; it radiated them; it spoke to you; it was alive. Now it’s gone,—a sudden disease has carried it off. Its physical elements are complete—in the fire, or up the chimney. Where’s the soul?”

“Oh! dear!” said Ursula.

Her tone seemed so funnily lugubrious that he laughed at her. “The diversion has succeeded,” he said. “It shall succeed; it deserves to succeed. You’re a brick. I use slang to re-assure you. And let me say, I had not utterly collapsed. I was striving against it. I wished to keep a fair front to you.”

“But you mustn’t make a stranger of me,” she said, smiling.

“I’ll go with you; or, no—you stay here. Let me show you my books and all my little things. We’ll have some dinner up.”

She allowed herself to be persuaded, and a message was sent to Betsy. Another happy evening was snatched from the jaws of desolation.

He regained much of his good spirits, feeling with a kind of exultation that Ursula was too strong for him. He showed her old and favourite books, prizes, photographs, keepsakes, all the miscellaneous personal attachments that form a broken comment on a man's history. They smiled over a lock of hair. "We were both very young," and he added, "she married a brewer." Something done up carefully in coloured tissue paper attracted her eye. He gave it to her with a little hesitation. When she saw that it was a medal from the Royal Humane Society, she laughed with delight, and clapped him on the shoulder.

"Tell me about it."

"Oh! it was cold, desperate, horrible. I didn't like it. I was in a great funk; but I got him out."

"Bravo!"

"And he drowned himself next day."

"Why?"

"He was trying to drown when I got him out. My labour was all in vain, you see."

"Oh! not in vain. Not in vain."

Yet a success so barren seemed terrible to her. To-night, in spite of her triumph, and the assur-

ance and relief that it brought, she felt that it was time for a step that she had for some time contemplated. No later than the next day Searle found himself an inmate of the Red Cottage. Ursula's prompt determination would have overcome much stronger objections than he had to make.

XIX

THE WHOLE WORLD KIN

A FEW days after Searle was installed at the Red Cottage, Ursula had set out to call on Mrs. Forwood, when she met Mr. Millington coming up the hill. He turned to watch her round the corner, and then slowly approached the cottage. Presently Betsy announced him, and Searle having, after some hesitation, assented, he entered and they shook hands rather stiffly.

“I hope you are feeling better.”

“Many thanks.”

“You are living here at present?”

“As you see.”

“I don’t want to seem inquisitive, Searle, but we have all been very—anxious you know. Nothing seriously wrong I hope? Of course, if you wish to keep the matter quiet—”

“Speaking generally, matters are best kept quiet.”

“But I hope there’s no real cause for anxiety.”

"Oh, no ; none for you."

"No ? Ah, well—eh ? I thought that perhaps your coming here—"

Searle looked curiously at him.

"Of course, an extreme case—a fatal malady, say—though even then—really I must say—most unusual. It's a delicate matter to interfere in, but really you know—under the circumstances."

"Speak plainly, or not at all."

"Miss Harland is held in respect—deserved respect."

"Yes, that will do. I see what you mean. Do you know I hardly thought of this as 'unusual' 'till I saw you coming up the garden walk. Accept that tribute to your moral tone. Well, I won't be angry ; probably you mean well." He reflected for a moment, and continued : "I think it will be best to be plain. I repudiate your right to ask for any explanation, and I question your taste in coming here to-day. However, it may be convenient to say that Miss Harland has permitted me to come here because I am ill, more or less, and shall be worse—can't recover in fact. Excuse my discussing the details. We thought we should like to be left alone—that's all."

He lit a cigarette, and, apologising, offered one to Millington, who shook his head.

"I am very sorry indeed to hear this."

Searle glanced at him, and saw that he was pale and subdued.

For the first time he appeared to be a fellow creature. "What a serious thing this death is," thought Searle, and looked again at Millington, dull, middle-aged, liable to disease and death, with sympathy. But he dreaded his condolences. Laughing, he said: "Why, the best man among you may be dead and buried in a week. I once met a fellow who was in one of the little wars—South African, I think—and he told me of a battle where they fought in a hollow square. In the middle were the doctors attending to the wounded, and close by was the parson in his surplice reading the service over the killed, while the pioneers were digging graves. A man was in the ranks full of health and life; in ten minutes he was buried and the Church of England service read over him."

Searle felt that his story was not strictly relevant, but he felt a despicable satisfaction in seeing that Millington admired his aplomb. After all, Millington represented something of

the life that he had to leave—nothing valuable, perhaps, but things common and despised took new aspects now.

A man who is astray will make enquiries in unlikely quarters. Searle's questions took the colour of an inquisitive humour.

"What do you make of it all, Millington?" he said. "Of course I know you're a churchwarden. You have your official view—that's understood; but we are quiet and confidential here; what supports you? Has it ever occurred to you what a desperate position we are in? What's your faith—hope? Or what is the colour of your apprehension? Don't give me the average vague generalities. What do you mean by hell and heaven, God and immortality?"

Thus conjured, Millington cast about in his mind for some passable formula and found none. If he had been capable of frankness, he might have acknowledged that nothing whatever had taken the place of a childish reminiscence of a heaven of white-robed angels beside a blue lake, totally inappropriate, as he felt, to this occasion. Still he had confidence in himself as a man who said the right thing, and he replied:—"As to the immortality of the soul, that has never been

doubted by any but inferior races or debased individuals."

"What do you mean by immortality, or, rather, how do you conceive it? Don't put me off with meaningless phrases. When the breath leaves the body, what then? You talk about belief? Have you a belief? What does such a man as you really believe?"

"These are not matters to be lightly discussed."

"Lightly! It's not so easy to be light with one foot in the grave."

"A man's inmost convictions are something sacred."

"Unless he's a parson, I suppose. Or are they not the inmost convictions that we hear from the pulpit? Now what a curious thing is this: we hear art, science, politics, eagerly discussed; everyone says the most intimate things he can about them, the closest, most penetrating, illuminating; because he's in earnest, such things are life to him. But turn to religion and you're all dumb; it's sacred, remote, frozen, stupid. You don't know what you believe; you believe nothing; you daren't discuss it. You call yourself a Christian. If Christ lived in Darley, you

would say he wasn't a gentleman, and you couldn't ask him to dinner."

"Really, Searle, this is outrageous."

"My dear fellow, if you will reflect upon it you'll find it's true. You came here to-day to give me a lesson in morals, or manners, or both; I doubt your competence for the task, and I invite you to a display of first principles, or at least of religious ideals. A churchwarden must have religious ideals."

"A churchwarden," said Millington with some dignity, "is chosen for certain practical qualities."

"Good; you are right. Well, I'm the drowning man clutching at straws. I've a frantic desire to get at the heart of everyone's mystery. It's not your fault if you've not got one."

"Your talk is a little wild, Searle. I can excuse it. I don't wish to be intrusive. If I can help you in any way, pray regard me as a friend—I, really"—

He faltered, overcome with emotion. Searle was startled, and they both rose as Ursula entered. She looked quickly at Searle, who laughed, saying: "It's all right. We've had quite a nice talk about the immortality of the soul. Now what's your opinion?"

"I should be sorry to think that all the people I know are immortal," said Ursula.

"It's good of you to call," she continued, "but he's not well you know, and I am looking after him now."

"For cards to view apply to Miss Harland," said Searle. When Millington had gone he said: "I think we'll get away from here for a time if you approve."

"Yes, dear. What did he want?"

"I think he came with some idea of remonstrance for my coming here; he was curious of course; but the strange thing is his sympathy."

"We'll forgive him for that."

"Why! he's a human being. I can see that. It wasn't that he said anything in particular, but as he spoke I noticed that he was a human being. This kind of thing pulls us together. Poor Millington, poor Ursula, poor human family. Yes, I should like to get away to the mountains or the sea."

"We'll go at once."

"Yes, in a day or two; in a few days; very soon. What's Millington's Christian name, I wonder?"

XX

THE EBB

HE had the desire to walk again to the Murder Stone, and though she feared that the exertion would be too severe for him, she ceased to oppose when it was evident that his mind was bent upon it. They set out after an early lunch on a frosty afternoon in November. There had been a fall of snow a few days before, succeeded by a strong east wind, which had cleared the roads and fields, piling up the snow in deep drifts against walls and hedges. It gave the country close at hand a curious piebald look, fading in the distance to beautiful variegated greys. They climbed the hill very slowly, often stopping to look back at the village which lay beneath them almost as if in a pit, and at the opposite hill where the gable of the Red Cottage, facing east, was a conspicuous mark. Presently he took her arm. They had reached

the steepest part of the hill, and he found some difficulty in proceeding. It was a revelation to both of them of the ebbing of his strength. She said: "I feel tired, and it's so cold to-day."

"I must do it—I must do it."

"Another day will do."

"It's hard for you—I know that; but I've set my mind on this. There's no reason in it—a mere caprice—but I must do it."

"Well, we'll go on easily."

When they had passed the steep part he got on better.

"A kind of victory," he said, "a barren victory. One exults in the victory, not the gain."

He leaned heavily on her arm, and his breath was pitifully short. "Not much more now," he said, "except the coming back, which has to be done. I wonder whether that will be easier; whether necessity is stronger than will. Of course it will be down hill. There's a distinction: will, up hill; necessity, down."

"Quite pleased with your little fancies, aren't you," she said.

He sat on a stone to get his breath again, and she took out her watch and said: "Two minutes."

"A benevolent despot. How strong and beautiful you look against a wintry landscape. I used to think of you in sunshine, among flowers. Now I have another impression. So, you should be painted. No, not painted; sculpture, sculpture is the art for you."

"Cold and abstract am I?"

"Abstract, yes. I rise to heights of admiration now. You are typical, eternal. You front the blasts; you are unshaken, benignant, always beautiful."

"Yes, keep at the ideal height."

"And if I decline I have you. And we shall get home sometime and there'll be a nice fire and tea, and there's the evening. And even now I may sit and look at you for two minutes."

"My poor boy, the two minutes is up."

"And I've wasted it all on the ideal. Another minute for the real."

They stood again by the Murder Stone. The valleys had been clear, but a mist clung to the top of the hill; the ragged plantation behind them was a mass of varying shade with mere indications of form; details were lost in one sombre impression. The Stone stood there, dull and implacable as an idol, the mark for vain

emotions; in front of it the little pool, frozen now, with red beech leaves, half rotted, on its margin.

“‘Change in recurrence,’” he said, quoting the title of a poem known to them, “it’s the saddest thing in life.” He continued: “I wish that some of my life could be blotted out. I wish that you and I had eternity before us—a year, a year, strong and well—would do. It’s singular that I should find a kind of relief in this childish talk.”

“We’ll stick to what we have,” she said, “and waste nothing. And we’re not going to waste our time analysing and introspecting either, recollect that. All the perfected ideas of the poets await us, much better than ours. Now home.”

“Well, there’s one improvement. I’ve got a home.”

The mists dispersed as they descended, revealing a sky of loose drifting clouds. They paused, and turned to look down a far valley, crossed and broken by ridges and depressions, and rising till it was merged in its sheltering hills. In the middle distance, on high ground, a manufacturing village reared its chimneys; beautiful in

poise and value. A squalid place, familiar to them in its intimate and ignoble aspect, it had now something of the glory of romance that belongs to the mysterious presence of man. Far beyond, the hills faded away in soft gradations. It was a landscape of greys, vast and stern, appealing to the imagination, hardly to the senses.

“My life or death is a small matter,” he said. “For the moment I feel that.”

She, too, gazing on that great quiet picture, was calmed by its immense envelopment. It gave a kind of relief, a kind of security. She had little taste for the exaggerations of sentiment; frankly she took what life could give. In this strait she had welcomed each mitigation and distraction. Sometimes her thoughts were projected far forward, beyond the darkness of the last calamity, to a haven of peaceful days. Now, looking out over the quiet world, she felt that safety and peace were always near at hand.

“A wide landscape,” he said, “with no allurements of colour; it makes death seem possible.”

As they descended the hill, he said: “I must get to the sea again; sky, sea, and sand; an

eternal simplicity, with perpetual variety. Dying is one of the fine arts, I see; one begins by eliminating all that is unnecessary, by claiming its negative advantages. What an accession of dignity it brings. It's common, but it can't be vulgar. The exchange of the poor and actual for all imaginative possibilities; already I feel the kinship with the stars.—I pain you?"

"No, these thoughts cannot be bad for you."

He perceived that his welfare was the measure of her pleasure or pain.

That evening she read to him, at his request, certain poems by a modern writer, first the one on the old dead city crumbling at the advance of the sea. Then he called for the other—that attempt to distil the spirit of man into the elemental changes of wind and sea; at once peaceful, desolate, and wonderful. It was his dream to leave behind these physical disablements and yet to exist as the spiritual essence of matter and force; before he became a speck of dust to be blown about the world, to feel the might of the wind, to realise in himself the sufficiency of the great natural forces which we interpret commonly in our own interests. To Ursula's intense practical care all this seemed hopeless

enough. The spirit can hardly swell beyond the iron ring of physical disabilities, and she saw that he began to cherish the illusion that by the sea, in quiet and solitude, it would be possible to put aside finally his gathering apprehensions; to await with equanimity the great dissolution.

Nevertheless she welcomed his proposal that they should leave Darley and seek out some quiet place on the coast. He wished to go eastward, but the distance and the possible bleakness deterred them, as did the formidable journey to the south. They compromised on a place, half fishing village, half watering-place, on the west coast, and here they found themselves presently in lodgings that were barely tolerable. Searle declined to stir on the chance of something better, though the fire smoked, the appointments of the room were depressingly hideous, and all Ursula's help and tact could hardly furnish a decent meal. However, they had a sea-view, and as they gazed out on the day after their arrival, the muddy sand and the blurr of sea and sky made a picture so dismal and limited, that Searle turned from it, laughing, to the fire."

"Still you must admit that there are no nigger-minstrels," said Ursula.

"I am lost in admiration of the human race. How does it keep so cheerful? It's a tradition, I suppose, and people are so conventional that they carry it on."

The day following was fair, and, yielding to a wish that her fine instincts discerned, she permitted him to go out alone. She knew that the success of his strange experiment must mean something like an estrangement from her, and she reflected upon its hopelessness with a sad security. He, too, she was convinced, knew that he was playing with an idea, that his impulsion was along a path, not to an end. Her love for him was part of her nature now, and it was reinforced by all the impulses of her common humanity; but love had been translated into care, and her care was subdued to a great patience.

"It was horrible," he said on his return. "My imagination wouldn't rise to it. I tried, but it was mere posturing. I sat down and waited for inspiration, for translation, and nothing came of it; so I began to mumble verses and compose pantheistic prayers, thinking of other

things all the time. I've caught cold; it was all absurd and uncomfortable, and my feet never left the ground. Then I thought of you here, and I came home."

"One can't leap into a new world; one has to grow."

"Growing and leaping are equally unlikely for me; I should have to fall into one."

"I ought to be glad, for there was no place for me in the new world."

"I knew all the time how it would be."

"There's something in the idea."

"One should be strong. A sick man may read of the wind and the sea, but the realities overpower him."

"We'll go out together next time."

"Yes; I got as far as to feel a dreadful loneliness out there."

After this they walked out together daily, choosing always the seaway, and to walk by the sea is to look seaward. Man may learn, even through hard usage, to love the earth; he can never love the sea. Yet its fascination appeals to a primal instinct. Its sway and flux, its patient, reticent advance, its slow retreat, its vast unnoted labours, are beyond all human analogy of power

and terror. It possessed his mind, not as an idealisation, but as a physical reality. Many times they watched it for its beauty, its changes of colour, its great majestic motions. Ursula tried to turn him toward these aspects, and he was not dead to its harmonies with cloud and shore or sunset glow ; but these impressions faded before its force, its persistence, its monotony, its mass. To conceive it as a friend or as an enemy seemed a strange impertinence. He would have hated its indifference, but his hatred seemed too paltry.

On a mild day of the early winter they sat together for a few minutes on a dry bank. A very short walk through the sand had tired Searle, and Ursula was silent, wishing to give him time to rest, but fearing lest any distracting interest should make the rest too long. He was playing with handfuls of sand, and as she looked at him she saw a curious intentness grow upon his face. She followed his eyes and saw the sand dribbling slowly through his fist. It seemed that he was pursuing a grim fancy. Looking up, he caught her eyes upon him. He threw away the sand, and, rising, walked quickly homeward. She put her arm through his to detain him,

but, hastening on, he let it fall away. She fell behind, but he turned and came back to her and held her hand. In the house he said: "I can't stay in this place. It's not peace I want. It's not simplicity. It's distraction. This drives me inward. Even you are not yourself here. I know I'm not fair; you wait on my moods; but I'm half mad with irritations—not with you; with everything but you; but they possess me, and you are here. I'm slipping away."

"Oh! break something," she cried. "Swear; here's my hat; tear it up and throw it in the fire. Don't baulk a natural instinct."

He laughed—"Nevertheless I can't go on like this."

She stood before him. "Here I am," she said, "look at me. You don't half know me; you don't do me justice. I'm infinite in resources. There is more life in a month with me than in years as you might live them. That I should have to say it—I mean it, too. The physical, distress—the pain—that's nothing to a man like you. But you're going to die; so are we all. These questionings and anticipations are not worth doing; they're the merest rubbish. No animal has them. No wise man will have

them. They belong to us half-way creatures. We'll leave them here to-morrow, and wherever we go you must be obedient and interested, and kind to me."

"Is it possible that I may be unkind to you? There's one of my horrible anticipations."

"Only in one way: by being unkind to yourself."

XXI

HOME

So he chose to return to Darley. "I can't die in the grand style," he said. "I want these little interests and distractions. The drowning man catches at a straw, you know, though he cared very little about straws on dry land."

The railway journey was a mournful business, and Ursula even refrained from the vain attempt to enliven it, husbanding her boasted resources for an occasion less hopeless. His saving reticence seemed to be breaking down. When she spoke of the great arteries of travel—north and south—and their contrast with the small cross-country line, dilatory and uncrowded, upon which they commenced their journey, he said: "Dead-alive; appropriate enough." The note of bitterness, of selfishness, was there, inevitable, ineradicable, she felt, but to be striven against, to be denied, overwhelmed. His eyes no longer sought hers in faithful comradeship. For an hour they

hardly spoke, while she watched his mood. Was it the delicate insight of a lover or her own structure of fanciful thought? When the train began to move quickly his face cleared; at its maximum speed he breathed freely; with the slackening came signs of depression; a stoppage froze him to a stern apathy. Again and again she seemed to recognize these changes, with a growing fear that they were but a trick of her mind, with a sorrowful doubt of her own stability. Yet through this she conceived something of his condition of exquisite sensibility, the nervous tension which left him at the mercy of trivial accidents. She foresaw that great demands might be made upon her. She formed no resolution of patience or tenacity—rather she schooled herself to see clearly. Her charity would be the fruit of observation, of intimate knowledge. Could this, came the re-action of her thought, degrade the quality of her pity, rob it of the mystery of its humanity? She had faith in science and in reason, and knew that they would not betray her.

They arrived at Darley on the wet December afternoon, tired and dispirited. The familiar motions of the train, the glimpses through the early twilight of well-known objects, the names

of wayside stations, all contributed to a confused and marred sense of home coming. Still when they found themselves again at the Red Cottage, they felt, as Searle said, that "This is no place to be miserable in." All that fire and light, cleanliness and order, could do, had been done, and their early dinner was, in its way, so good, that Ursula, enjoying it as she watched the revival of wit and spirits in her lover, felt towards Betsy a gush of thankfulness and love.

"Warmth and food are two good things," said Searle.

"Especially as they help to something better."

"Yes, isn't it surprising that they should help me to see you clearly?"

"How?"

"Have I been kind and just to the best woman on earth to-day?"

"And if you had not, which I don't acknowledge for a moment, you repair the balance now. Don't praise me, above all, don't overpraise me."

"The merest justice."

"The result of a good dinner. What marvellous insight Shakespeare had—

'Justice—

In fair round belly with good capon lin'd.'"

They laughed, but as he raised the wine-glass and looked at her, there were tears in his eyes. He drank to her smiling, and then threw the glass into the fire. "Fantastical," he said, "and foolish. Can you interpret my folly in your honour? Just now I want to 'drink up esil, eat a crocodile.' I'm overwhelmed with my powerlessness. In my moments of strength I can do nothing, because what I have to do can't be done in moments. Now, I would die for you, gladly, happily. I can do nothing, but I would die for you. I hate death—never more than now—but I would die for you. This is my true self, believe that."

Hand in hand they passed to the other room and sat down side by side. They looked at one another with unclouded eyes, happy in a love that triumphed again over time and circumstance. The consciousness of sex, faint and attenuated, gave colour to relations humanly spiritual. Passion was subdued, the fervours, the splendours of a complete union were not theirs; the refinements, the tenderness remained.

So, together, with patience and fortitude they fought their lost battle, husbanding at last the wrecks of his patience, the wrecks of his

fortitude. Again and again his desire to serve her, to help, to repay—prolonged beyond the cessation of personal vanity—roused him from fits of gloom or lethargy to spurts of life, becoming less and less sustained. They tried to take up the thread of their life at Darley, not entirely without success, but with no continuity of success. He found himself often the prey of little querulous fancies, stupid irrelevant irritations. They overpowered his will and his nature, and, senseless and ignoble as he knew them to be, they were received by her with many variations of raillery or with kind indifference. His apologies became more self-reproachful till she begged him to desist from them.

“These things are a matter of course,” she said; “you might as well ask my pardon for a sleepless night.”

“I ought to ask your pardon for a great deal; for having been born, among the rest.”

“Nay, nay,” she cried impatiently, and added: “I am not one that would obliterate anything; regrets—well, regrets are often only a fainter recurrence of the self-indulgence that provoked them.”

She spoke rather sententiously, and led him on to a discussion that served as a distraction.

Few people in the English middle-class could have the hardihood to dine on mutton and rice pudding on Christmas Day. Even superior persons recognise the opportunity for an amiable concession to festive traditions.

A few days before Christmas Ursula had received the present of a goose from three of the village young men. She was touched by this present, a generous one for poor men, and representing a friendliness that was no small sustenance to her. Searle, too, was roused to more than a passing interest. He questioned her about the donors, obtaining a distinct impression or recollection of each of them. Then he selected three books from his collection, wrote their names in them, and gave them into her charge. "Not now," he said ; "afterwards."

The goose settled the question of the Christmas dinner, for he declined the safety of chop or steak, and even insisted on a portion of the plum pudding which Betsy had prepared as a matter of course. He had a ridiculous idea that he had never done complete justice to goose as an article

of food, and the thought of lost opportunities brought a faint wave of melancholy which made him smile. He roused himself to an effort. "A light touch," he said; "you once complimented me on my light touch. One mustn't be frivolous though. How difficult everything is when you begin to think. We must eliminate thought—tentative thought—and evolve nicely ordered sensations."

"Such as Christmas," said Ursula. "Is that a nicely ordered sensation?"

"I tell you that the outsider can't get at the heart of the matter. Criticism will die down, movements in unison are for the future. Now, people are so much afraid of conforming; everyone wants to be original."

"Well, by conforming one hardly gets freshness of sensation."

"What I regret is missing the great obvious things. I seem never to have breathed deeply. Scents and tastes, what infinite opportunities! Affairs of the mind are doubtful and harassing; physical sanity, physical exuberance, are what I want. A man told me once that he thought the greatest pleasure in life was to run a mile under a hot sun; to feel his strength, to sweat and

burn, to fight nature, to be overcome and happily exhausted. Exhaustion—the pleasures of exhaustion—not this kind.”

“Yes, yes,” said she, “but his pleasure came from the mind. A stupid man would never have seized it.”

He looked at her dully, and a sick apprehension came over her of the time when he should lose his quickness of response. Nothing seemed to her so terrible as the egoism of the dying, that intense preoccupation, partly the result of peremptory physical demands, and partly, as it seems the pathetic endeavour to retain that old dear familiar self, incredibly slipping away. She rarely permitted herself the luxury of a sorrowful reflection on her lover’s case, but on this night she fell into a strain of that easy pessimism which, at a hard crisis, awaits the unguarded moment.

Instinctively she schooled her face to conceal her thoughts, yet, later in the evening, she could have believed herself punished for this relaxation. She had been reading aloud, and glanced occasionally at him, to try to read his fixed inscrutable regard. Pausing to make a comment, she waited for his response, but he shook his head, and she

perceived that he had not been listening. As she turned over the pages, hesitating, he spoke: "I suppose that the idea of your leaving me never occurs to you? Why do I ask? I know that it does not." He paused, and continued: "I am justified in staying with you only so long as my conduct—bearing—are above reproach."

"What nonsense."

"And if it should be best for me that we should part?"

"It couldn't be."

"Let me say plainly that these base terrors are gaining on me. My mind reverts to images—to my father—to—to him most. My will has less power to throw them off. Already, as you have seen—and you to see me all the time."

"Ah! but—I'm a wise person, a safe person."

"Yes, the worse I am—the more I try you, the greater is your opportunity—your accomplishment—for you can't fail. If you had a breaking point—if you cried, raved—how pitiful that would be. But, no—you are too hard for me." He started up. "Leave me, leave me. Let me die in my own dog's way. A man should die grumbling and cursing; all the rest is

affectation. You've brought me so far. You've performed miracles."

"I mean to perform a few more yet."

"I have a certain curiosity as to your aim. Is it merely to make my way easier—to let me fall softer?"

"I think it is that in effect, but it is not wholly that."

"If groans and curses would relieve me, would you have me use them?"

"I would not."

"You would drag me at the heels of your idea?"

"You would not be alone."

"A kind of transcendant selfishness."

"Union, oh! think of it as union."

"My mind's poisoned. I'm possessed by a devil, my poor girl. How much better if I had died three months—even a month ago. What will my memory be? What can you think of me? I aspired to be your equal; I fall lower every day. You've such wonderful tact that I never see any reproach; but then I think how much there must be, if you keep it all from me. To eliminate it altogether—it's too much—it's bad art; you overdo it."

"There's no art ; you see my mind."

"Ah ! your mind is the slave of your will. It has no holidays, no excursions. I believe you could school yourself to be dull ; but you see everything, you remember everything, and you will remember everything. No will, no schooling, can make you forget."

"Why must I forget the best of my life ? Nothing can alter that. What is the worst that may come ? That in your illness you may say or do what would be distressing if you were well. I snap my fingers at it. We do our best, that's all. No ; the worst is that I must lose you and you must lose me. For anything else, you may scold and worry as you please. It matters nothing."

"You're not consistent ; you're stooping to me now. Now answer this truthfully—would you rather that I died at once, soon, or that I lived on, getting worse, more miserable, less restrained."

"Your death now would be the greatest misfortune to me that I can conceive."

"You say that, you think that ?"

"Yes."

"A little longer, then, a little longer."

For some weeks after Christmas he felt better.

He seemed to regain command of himself, and Ursula's spirits rose quite out of proportion, as she knew, to the circumstances. Sometimes, in these days, Searle forgot for a time what cloud it was that darkened his life, and recollected with a start that he was a dying man. But faint delusive hopes arose: he was not growing worse, he almost believed himself to be stronger; perhaps the impossible had happened—the disease was arrested. So faint was the hope, so shallow the delusion, that the thought of going to a doctor again was enough to dissipate them. He thought, with a fanciful irony, that though a delusion may be very useful, it requires delicate treatment.

Towards the middle of February he became suddenly worse. It seemed that at last the disease had begun the attack on vital organs, that the final stage of the struggle had been reached. He had several sharp shocks of pain which he bore with composure, and having rallied from them he seemed better again, though appreciably weaker.

Old Dr. Wellburn, the Darley practitioner, encouraged him to hope for a comparatively easy period, but his fortitude did not long out-

last the pain that had called for it. He knew that he had lost ground that could never be regained, and weakness and physical embarrassments began to press upon him.

Mrs. Forwood was their occasional and only visitor. She did not come often because her visits seemed to distress and excite Ursula, but Searle was always glad to see her. One afternoon she had called and induced Ursula to go out while she remained with him. He talked to her with voluble freedom, like a child released from control.

“To lose the sun and the stars, all those great remote things, even to lose my friends, that seems possible, certain even; but what I can’t realise is the loss of the little near-at-hand personal things—my old books, and the look of the pages that I know, and the thumb marks. My Shakespeare is dog-eared here and there; I was trying to straighten them out to-day, and thinking that nobody knew of it but me. We all have our little meaningless secrecies, I suppose, that help to make us so individual. Look at my hands; what a curious affection one has for one’s hands—old working friends. I don’t want to part with

them. Look at this thumb, how curious and twisted; it was broken at cricket, keeping wicket. Do you know, it's rather odd, but it's the slower balls that are likely to hurt when you keep wicket? You close your hands too soon, and it catches the end of your thumb. Yes, all these things are so intimate and particular. Do you believe in the resurrection of the body?"

"My dear boy—yes. I profess it, and I hope I believe it."

"Well, I hope it's true. Just now I wish for it, at least. I should like a resurrection of dogs, and books, and old walking-sticks too. Really the immortality of the soul is too thin to give comfort to a dying man. How do immortal souls recognise one another? I should never know my friends. Your husband now--what a quiet fine old boy he is, but what could I make of his naked soul? I want his brave pink face, and the kind look in his eyes, and the spectacles. Why do I talk like this to you? I'm a child again, and I want a mother to listen to me."

"Go on, my boy, if it helps you."

"I suppose you would call me a materialist. Did you ever hear a theory of another world:

that we shall know one another just so far as our spiritual intercourse here has made it possible? What is the use of all these speculations? We are shut in by heights that we know we can never scale, and yet we spend our time in the practice of climbing. Well, you let me talk now. Once I could hardly get in a word."

She smiled and shook her head.

He went on: "All these thoughts are unprofitable, you'll say. Cling to what remains of life. But death is fascinating, and I want to grow used to the idea. It's impossible, of course, but to avoid it altogether, you can't; it pursues you. But face it: a kind of desperate cowardice."

"A little old-fashioned faith in God would help you."

"It would, you're right; it would smooth matters wonderfully. But how to get it? God? I can't conceive Him as benevolent, nor even as malignant. A supreme artist, perhaps? Oh! I'm tired of it all."

XXII

TOO GREAT A BURDEN

HE sat up in bed. "I want you to do something for me," he said. "A telegraph form, please." He dictated Kirke's address and a message of enquiry, reply paid. Betsy was despatched with the telegram. "Naturally you are curious," he said. "Did I determine not to tell you? I can't remember." And he told of his visit to Kirke, and directed her where to find the phial. She held it in a hand that trembled a little, took out the stopper, and smelt at it; then looked at the phial wistfully, respectfully.

"I meant not to tell you. I don't know why I do so now."

"It startles me; it takes my strength away."

"Poor girl, you are pale; you shouldn't know of it. I had forgotten again the embarrassment, the difficulties that this might cause you."

"It's a precious thing. I can't think about it. No, we won't use it."

“Oh! I cling to life yet; but there comes a time. Can I trust myself to the end? Already you have seen. It may be a crime; it's no sin. Why did I tell you? I can't stand alone—can't think. I come to you. What you appear to me—it's more than faith, more than love. I loved you before. You're all there is; the world's gone; life's gone. I cling to you. Thank God! I can see you. I can hold your hand. Thank God! Whatever that means. I would spare you I would help you—you understand; make allowances; help you.”

He sank back. She put the phial on the table, and put her arms round him. We'll do without it; it's there—a last refuge.”

“Would you?”

“If a time should come when it would be best—yes.”

“But you should not know of it. You must not get into trouble. Put it here on the table, close at hand.”

“No, it shall be here on the shelf, out of your reach.”

“As you will. And you would do it? You are a strong woman. I wish I were worthier. You won't judge me now. You take me at

my best, remember me. You have life before you—a long happy life. I hope that; I like to think that; and you'll meet some man—better than I—what I might have become—what I would have become. You will be happy yet? I shan't have spoilt your life?

“You will always be a part of it.”

“I have not been a bad man. I believe I've tried harder than most. It's a pity, Ursula. It seems a dead loss. And with you—there seemed to be a clearer outlook.”

There are times of nervous excitement when life asserts itself in a burst of exaltation provoked by the very nearness of death. Searle roused himself again.

“I accept all this,” he said; “it is childish to speak of injustice, of malignity. Mystery—yes. I want years of life, a thousand sensations that I have never had. No, I want the old sensations over again. It's the past that I regret, not the future. Yet, Ursula, believe me, at this moment I do shake myself free from the trammels of sense. Am I high flown? I would fly high, indeed. I am glad to have lived; I am proud of the race of man. I don't know where it all tends, but we are making a brave fight, a beautiful

fight. Death—death for me; cessation—annihilation—blackness, hell. I lose you for ever. Well, ‘I will encounter darkness as a bride.’ ”

Deluded by the ready flow of emotion at white heat, he exulted in a power merely spasmodic; soon to cool and stiffen into shapes unaccustomed and intractable. Presently he muttered: “I’m a coward. I may get the better of it at times, but I’m a coward.”

“I have a great respect for cowards. Their lives are made up of braveries.”

“Bravo! a paradox. Yes, it’s the losing battle that brings out the qualities.”

Later he roused himself again when Betsy tapped at the door, and he stretched out his hand for a telegram. He gave it to Ursula, and she tore it open and read in a matter-of-fact tone: “Mr. Kirke died last week.” Searle turned away, gathering the bed-clothes above his ears.

Soon he turned to look at her:—

“Why should I die like a stoic? For your sake? For your sake, I suppose. Oh! leave me. I want to curse, to cry out. You oppress me. The time for your help is past. I’m a mere rabid dog snapping at everything now. I know what it should be, I know the correct

attitude—a noble reticence, an unwavering fortitude. I should strengthen you, I should help you. I can't do it. I can't do it, and I see the hideousness and the folly. Yes, I understand that poor devil Kirke better now. Stoicism? Can anything be more silly? It's only dying before one's time—the composure of a death's head, the cultivation of a dogged stupidity. I do face death. I come out into the open. I watch the process—the decay of the body, the derangement of the mind. Why, it might be worked up into a very quintessence of sensation, an epicureanism of mystery. Where is the courage in taking refuge in a mere attitude?—the monumental figure of dull fortitude? But I'm shaken by mere undertaker horrors, that's the degradation. I'm a pitiful maundering coward. Forgive me—this dreadful egotism—I don't remember you; I forget that you can be hurt. My own horrible self possesses me; I'm concentrated here. It's time to go. I've sucked my life dry and gnaw the bitter rind—time to shuffle off the mortal coil—not shuffle—spurn it with a grand gesture—that's what you wish for. Where is that little bottle? Up there? I think I see it. Leave me now. I want to think—a last effort.”

She saw that he was trembling.

"I can't think. Logic is out of the question. I must collect myself, that's it. What do you say now? Have you anything to say?"

"I must think, too."

He turned feebly to look at her and her heart sank at the change in his face. It reminded her of a hunted creature cowering in its last ineffective hiding place. As she looked at him she saw an alteration. He regained a semblance of composure. His will triumphed over these disintegrating emotions. With admiration and love, and an infinite pity, she saw the re-assertion of his personal dignity. He put one or two questions to her, gave certain directions. They pointed to a final arrangement.

She placed her hand within his. He raised it to his lips and laid it down. His brow contracted in earnest thought; a little later his look was almost blank; a purposeless gaze.

He fell asleep as she watched him. The necessity of a final resolve pressed upon her, but consecutive thought was impossible. Her eyes followed her mind to the phial. If, presently, he should demand it, what would she do?

How would the poison affect him? Would it

be slow or quick in its operation? Painful? She turned her mind away.

The branch of a tree rattled slightly against the window. Yes, outside, the garden was much as it was yesterday, as it would be next week, next year. The road ran past, up and down, at the old slope. It looked much the same ten years ago, and it would look much the same ten years hence, unless there was building here.

But if it were better for him, better for her, that this should end, would that be a sufficient justification? The question of personal danger or inconvenience did not trouble her, but one of the strongest motives of her nature, acquired though it was, was her conception of good citizenship. And now it was impossible to consider this calmly; logic must yield to impulse. Which way would impulse force her? She tried to put herself in his place, to think his thoughts, and was shaken at the enormous allowance her good sense compelled her to make for his moral disease. She longed for his death; and again a rush of triumphant emotion proclaimed that, even now, he was all the world to her; that the last bitter dregs were yet the acceptable draught. She reproached herself for weakness, for dwelling

on the irrelevance of his ravings, for failing to appreciate to the full the flashes of his wit, the resources of his fortitude. She looked at his face, sallow and thin, with its mysterious expression, its peculiar detachment and foreignness. Already he seemed to be a stranger to her, an alien to the world they had known together. A deeper shadow than sleep lay upon him.

Again her critical habit helped her. She was struck by the beauty of the head, the pathos of its abandonment, the refinement of its lines, even its quiet force. She had a moment's gladness in the thought that it was not the head of a weak man. His failure was no ignoble, meaningless collapse; he was subjugated by his imagination—a kind of imagination.

Suddenly she realised that time pressed, that her thoughts were straying; she must collect herself, must decide. But now her mind was a blur of dancing images. The heat of the room oppressed her, and she crossed to the water-jug, dabbled her hands in it, and laved her face. She became cold and a little faint, her legs trembled, and she had a dreadful longing for rest—for sleep. Trying to recall herself, she muttered, "Conscience—logic," vaguely hoping to provoke her

thoughts, and again, "Conscience—logic"—with a kind of sneering irony. Looking at him the suggestion of a sequence seemed to come with "Charity." The definiteness of the words seemed to take her no further. Ah! the phial, to handle that, to hold that would steady her. She took it down, and, turning, met his opening eyes.

On his face bewilderment was succeeded quickly by the burden of consciousness, and again by a terror of apprehension. He tried to rise—to speak, but he writhed and stammered in impotent haste. She stepped towards him, still holding the phial in her hand, but he shrank away, burying his head in the bed clothes like a frightened child. Soon he peered forth eagerly, and saw her standing motionless.

"Go," he cried; "leave me, I won't have it—keep off—it's murder. Curse you—damn you. Oh! no, Ursula! I can't die. I won't die. Don't ask me to do it. Keep away. Life, any kind of life."

He sat up in the bed, looking at her over his knees: "How often I've wondered if it would come true—if it would come to this. Everything led to this; this is the end, almost the end."

He watched the hand with the phial furtively but closely. She set it down, and, filling a bowl with water, took out the stopper and quickly poured the stuff away. He half rose to watch, then sinking down he breathed deeply.

Presently he said : "I could be happy now were it not that you despise me."

"I do not despise you ; I do not."

Slowly, and with the careful balance of a literary appreciation, he said :—

" 'The weariest and most loathed worldly life,
That age, ache, penury, and imprisonment '—"

He stopped, and her mind travelled back to a night long ago, when the stars shone and the world seemed infinitely younger. He looked at her. "How you have changed—or is it I? You are beautiful, inflexible, stony. The light has gone out of your face. The joy of life—that's the phrase ; the joy of life has gone. To present an unyielding surface—to hold oneself in subjection. Your way"—

"Well now, leave me my way, whatever it is, and take your own."

"If one could only have a mind in water-tight compartments."

"It's a very imperfect world, my poor boy."

“And do we tend to perfection? Is that the ultimate good?”

“Perfect actions would seem a kind of crystallisation into a design.”

“Instinctive, yes—or mechanical? And consciousness?”

“Consciousness—our broken consciousness—is an attribute of imperfection; there is none with perfect peace.”

“Is this all very profound, or only skimble-skamble? Peace? I don’t want peace. Your suggestion is very clever, my dear Ursula. Call it by its right name.”

“Death, then—death.” She stretched out her arms, and her body heaved in the relief of a physical expansion.

“Rest, or peace, or death—it’s all one. Why do you reject it? What can life give you at the best? What is it but a continual makeshift—a series of broken, blurred impressions; useless, irritating; weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable. I pity you now; presently I shall envy you.”

“If I could see it so.”

“You must see it so.”

“A deliverance?”

“Ah, yes.”

“And then?”

“Then?”

“Yes—yes—we have talked of this before, I know that. There was life before us then. It makes a difference. After all, isn't it possible—certain—certain I mean—great men—men whom you revere—have held by this definite personal immortality. It's impossible that we should love one another like this; impossible. You don't reply. Why don't you lie to me? I ask to be deluded, if it's a delusion. Death's impossible, impossible.” His voice rose on a sharp note.

“It may be so.”

“It is so. I tell you it is so. You're a hard woman.”

“When you spoke of this before, you said—”

“Never mind what I said; it's different now. You have never yet denied me your help. You see what I want, what I need. Good God! what a child I am! And your composure is magnificent, though, by-the-bye, it's not you that's dying. I get worse and worse—nearer to the brute I am. What a damnable thing is truth. Did my character ever justify your intensely serious treatment of it?”

“Poor boy! You must have your little fling.”

“And how about my little soul?”

“That’s as may be; it’s not for us to decide.”

“Can you let me go?”

“Don’t—don’t make it so hard for me.”

“You forget our summer days together?”

“No, never.”

“Another summer with you.”

“Is this a time for gallantries?”

“Gallantries?”

“Summer is past. A drowning man may clutch at straws, but does he apostrophise the sunset?”

“Bitter—doubtless wholesome. You reveal new capacities. You’re a woman that one wouldn’t tire of. Ah! By-the-bye, grant a point in my favour. I don’t bear pain badly. I haven’t complained.”

“No, there would be some sense in that.”

They laughed together.

With the disappearance of the poison he rallied again. To a man on the scaffold it seems of little account that his reprieve is for a week and not for all time; but as the days pass the blackness closes on him again with all the added terrors of its former imminence. Searle did not suffer great pain, but his weakness and lassitude in-

creased. A rally of his physical powers became little more than an increased activity of misery. He lay for hours in sullen apathy, rejecting her delicate advances. Sometimes she compelled his attention, even his interest, and held them, provoking a passion of gratitude and self-reproach that she vainly attempted to stem. Nevertheless, she felt him to be slipping further from her; her power over him became less; his expressions towards her seemed less sincere and more punctilious. She reproached herself for pedantic efforts to incite, to stimulate, rather than to ease. Was it for her own selfish satisfaction that the moral effort should be continued to the last? Was it only a childish desire for a good end?

Again she asked herself in what this last residue of life differed from the rest. Circumstances could change the possibilities, they could not efface the obligation of the spiritual bond. He, at his best, would choose to struggle for the sanity of self-respect against all insidious concessions of sense. The remnants—nay, the perpetual possession—of her pride in him forbade her, even now, to confine her mission to solacement alone.

XXIII

A LAST AFFRONT

URSULA stood at the window, gazing out with hungry eyes, weary with the terrible *ennui* of the sick room.

“What do you see?” he said.

“I see the rocks on Whaley Moor and a cloud drifting over them; down in the village roofs and chimneys and a whirl of blue smoke.”

“I shall never see it again.”

His tone roused a strange resentment. She said:

“Well, I see it—I see it.”

They were silent, then, for a long time.

Watching her face with an idle intentness, he saw ever so little a change there.

“Who’s that?” he said.

She answered without looking round: “Mrs. Brayshaw.”

“Stop her; call her in; knock at the window.”

She turned in astonishment. "You mean it?"

"Yes—quick."

She rapped upon the pane with her knuckles."

"I'm afraid she can't hear it. She has gone too far. No doubt she will pass again presently."

"Was she going up the hill?"

"Yes."

"She may not return this way."

"I think she will. If you desire it, I will ask Betsy to intercept her."

"Do so."

Presently she said: "She is coming in."

He answered a look of enquiry: "I wish to see her."

Ursula found Mrs. Brayshaw in the parlour, and they shook hands, eyeing one another not unkindly. They ascended the stairs together, and Mrs. Brayshaw remained for the moment at the door while Ursula went in.

"She is here. I shall be within call. Don't agitate yourself, and don't let her remain long."

To Mrs. Brayshaw she said, as she shut her in: "Not long."

The interview lasted longer than Ursula had expected, but she hesitated to interrupt it. When at last Mrs. Brayshaw came out, she took Ursula's

hand in her own hot and nervous grasp, saying :
“He is all right. Come down stairs.”

In the parlour they faced one another. Ursula was amazed at the glittering eyes and excited bearing of her rival. Her rival ? Why did that word come into her mind ?

Mrs. Brayshaw went to the window and looked out upon the road, smiling and reflecting. She said : “Had you thought of getting a nurse ?”

“At present it is not absolutely necessary, and he did not wish it.”

“No ; it has been a great strain on you nevertheless.”

“To be able to do something relieves the strain.”

“No doubt. He proposes that I should stay here and—help you.”

“It is not necessary.”

“He wishes it however.”

“His proposal is intended kindly to me or to you—perhaps to both of us—but I think you will see that it is better not to accept it.”

“No, I don’t see that.”

“Of course we wish to do what is best for him. I cannot think that if we are here together it will be good for his peace of mind.”

"No doubt you are right."

"Then?"

"The question is, which of us should remain with him."

Ursula regarded her with frank surprise. A flush of anger dyed her face, and faded, leaving her very pale.

"I am sorry," said Mrs. Brayshaw. "It is all very strange. Have you wearied him with preachments? Set up an impossible standard? Take it as a sick man's whim."

"I must go to him."

"Not now."

"This is my house."

"I see that it's not his."

Ursula left the room, and slowly mounted the stairs. Mrs. Brayshaw followed, catching at her dress.

"If you go in, it is against his express desire."

Ursula's hand was at the door; it was seized and held by the other.

"It's a lie; release my hand."

"Ah! poor Ursula; how much I could forgive you."

Searle's voice from within cried: "What is that whispering? Open the door."

They entered together.

"I can't stand a scene," he said. "Why do you whisper outside the door? It's a horrible thing to do."

"What is this, Harry?"

"Hasn't she told you?"

"I don't trust her."

"Well, I wish to relieve you. It has become impossible. You never relax, but you'll break down."

"No! No! What is it?"

"Shall I come to hate you?"

"This must cease," said Mrs. Brayshaw.

"Now look here, Harry," said Ursula—her tone was quiet, conversational—"You've got some kind of sick man's delusion. I don't relax, you say. Of course I don't any more than I can help, because I want to encourage you. Is it necessary for me to assure you of my pride in the fight you've made, and my gratitude—my gratitude for the many happy hours you've given me—extorted for me from all this. They're a possession—a precious possession—for ever. Oh! no. We won't leave one another yet."

"It's over; it's over. I want to hide away from you."

"Ah ! well, I'll leave you for a little."

"Stay !" he cried, "this must end now. I can't have it hanging over me."

"Well, then," she said, "I do make this appeal to you—not for myself alone, though it is my happiness to be with you—I ask you to think of the last year. We've lived it together. Let us go on ; there's no break, and we can't, we can't leave one another. Am I hard and cold ? It's only—it's only that—"

She met Mrs. Brayshaw's look.

"Yes, it is that I have tried to keep you at your best, and I won't relax from that—I won't—"

Mrs. Brayshaw spoke : "Does your conceit and folly go so far ?"

"You don't understand."

"I understand your hideous selfishness."

"Silence," said Searle. "She's an angel of light ; she can't do wrong, but she expects too much. It's wearisome to a degraded brute like me to have these useless, hopeless ideals paraded constantly. It amounts to nothing, of course. I lie here in my bed—nothing can alter that. These four walls contain it all. What does my frame of mind matter ?"

“It does matter.”

“Where’s your sense of humour? You would preach to a mad dog.”

“Oh! be a man.”

“Ah! the breaking point—the breaking point is reached. Is it sincere? I believe it’s an experiment, a new form of stimulant for me. I’m tired—I’m sick—you weary me.”

“I’m going, Harry. When you want me I’ll come.”

“You will permit me to remain?” said Mrs. Brayshaw.

“You are welcome here.”

“Magnanimous to the last.”

“Accept my congratulations.”

Something like a laugh came from the bed.

“The breaking point at last.”

Ursula left the room. When, presently, Mrs. Brayshaw came down, she said: “Betsy is getting your bed-room ready, and will, if you please, go for your things. Will you take your choice of these two sitting-rooms?”

“The other.”

“If he should ask for me—or if he should want me—”

They looked at one another. "I would let you know."

Some days later the old Darley doctor came down from his visit to Searle to Ursula's sitting-room. He was on terms of familiar friendship with her, and, holding her hand, he scrutinised her face closely.

"I can't understand it," he said at last, "and why you bring that woman here passes my comprehension. A nurse was wanted, certainly. It's not enough to have the village nurse in, even daily. But she's no nurse. She does her best and is knocking herself up, but why did she come? And I don't understand her. She might be pleased about something. I've seen her smiling. And one moment she's like a ghost, and the next in a high fever. This is not the way for a nurse. Well now, you must prepare for the worst; he is losing ground; he seems to have given up trying. I don't know what is going on, and I don't enquire; but you must either get a nurse or make some other arrangement. He must not be left."

Searle declined to allow them to get a nurse, and assented indifferently to the necessity of

Ursula's partial reinstatement. So the situation broke down before the mere conveniences of the case.

She had not seen him for a week, and perceived at once a great change. She approached him quickly and touched his head in greeting, while he muttered thanks. They refrained from comment or excuse. Ursula had reproached herself before for missing the right degree of compromise in the impossible task that she had undertaken, but now there was no question of compromise. He seemed to be past effort, and lay, hour after hour, staring with blank intentness at the wall. She could perceive no difference in his manner towards Mrs. Brayshaw and herself. He spoke little, but accepted their offices with courtesy, readily excusing any little clumsiness from want of experience. To Ursula there was something terrible in this dull pause between the crisis of emotion and the end which now seemed very near. The craving for relaxation, for a loosening of the tension, which had prompted her dismissal, could have no practical outcome. She strove to regard this choice, this final incredible preference of her rival, philosophically, scientifically, but her instincts were in revolt.

He lay there, yet the living man she loved. If he spoke, she could recognise the tricks of voice; not less surely did he reveal traces of the habits of mind. Broken meaningless tendencies remained; the whole meaning was blurred, irrecoverable. She had the dread that these last days would bite so deeply into her mind, that all just and happy impressions would be effaced. Earnestly she strove to recover from the present wreck the pure note of tragedy. She sought for calmness and strength through that wide and impersonal view of life to which the severity of critical habit tends. Not the less did she endeavour, by any means that suggested themselves, to ease and recreate her mind.

Mrs. Forwood paused at the door of the sitting-room, hearing voices.

"It's no use, Betsy," said Ursula, "you always beat me. I can't keep my mind on it."

"Try again, Miss," said Betsy as Mrs. Forwood entered.

"Dominoes!" cried Ursula; "Come and play at dominoes with Betsy. It's better than cards, more solid and respectable. I'm a little silly to-day, and she beats me every time. Betsy ministers

to my needs. To-morrow it will be a box of bricks and a doll. Oh ! dear !”

Mrs. Brayshaw came quickly down stairs, calling for Betsy. She saw them through the open door and entered. Ursula sprang up crying : “Why do you come in here ? The other is your room. You insult—insult.” She sat down hugging herself with folded arms.

“I beg your pardon,” she said. “Betsy keeps beating me at dominoes and it vexes me. Oh ! it does, Betsy. I know I made you promise to play your best, but you are too conscientious. I hate losing control of myself. I hate being childish. I want to do something. Let me go up again. Why are you here ?”

“I want Betsy to go for the doctor. There seems to be a change.”

Betsy went out quickly and the others went upstairs.

Ursula was alone beside the bed when Searle opened his eyes. He murmured something, and she stooped to listen. Then, in a weak voice, he said : “Brandy ? When had I brandy ? My mind’s going ; I can’t remember it. I thought my sense of smell was wrong, but—why, its you !”

“I did take a little brandy.”

“Oh, God ! it’s you.”

Quickly she saw a great possibility, she trembled with a spasm of hope. In this desperate expedient to relieve her weakness did he see, in a last flash of life, the greatness of her devotion ? She craved a word or a sign ; she hungered for reconciliation, for a moment of understanding, of union. Kneeling by the bed, she seized his hand. “You love me,” she whispered. But he looked at her with cold eyes, he frowned a little, and she relaxed her grasp. Rising, she adjusted the bedclothes, and passed quietly from his sight.

XXIV

THE WORLD REVOLVES

WHEN she stood beside the bed watching the faltering struggle of the mechanism of the body, she was surprised at her own calmness. It was not resignation, nor even the stupor that succeeds an incredible calamity. Amazement filled her heart, and a subdued expectation. Looking at him, and gathering an intense impression, sensitive to each movement and sound, her mind strayed beyond the present. She thought of the commonness of death. Everywhere men and women lay dying. Life itself seemed to be one great losing struggle. She remembered that as a child she had been told that a person died every minute—every minute? or was it every second? She gave up a half-hearted attempt to consider which would be nearer to the truth. All over the world, in every city, in every town, in innumerable villages, in solitary houses, they

lay—everywhere this useless dreadful wrestle. Everyone—figures of friends and acquaintances flitted across her mind—everyone came at last to this. She felt the need of a harder, less sentimental habit of mind; concessions to pity and sympathy made life impossible; callousness, aloofness, seemed the saving qualities. She recalled his phrase of “a mind in watertight compartments,” she wished for a will that would dominate her emotions, but her mind, perpetually ebbing and flowing, warned her again of the tyranny of the will, that hard coercer of natural impulses, of inspirations of the moment, of generous concessions. She recognised her thoughts as efforts in self preservation, and asked herself scornfully whether, if the choice were given, she would have these brothers and sisters who were dying round her to be to her as puppets. For the moment she was almost happy in the fervour of her claim on life, her share in its shattering emotions, the rejection of a comfortable baseness. She, too, would lie in her turn, unfriended; he would not be there. She would die alone, far from here, years away from him, old, forgotten, forgetful. She tried to stamp his features on her mind. Dear and familiar

as they were, she feared now to lose the sharpness of their impression. She looked upon his wasting body with a peculiar tenderness, and still amazement possessed her. That he should rise from the bed, fresh and strong, to hold her in his arms, would be less incredible than this. How could such a miracle be performed? Her mind played over these delusions. If Time could roll back, these past months must yet be lived again, the same end be reached. The world is a hard, concrete, place—effect and cause—tendency and environment—no escape—mere flutterings of the mind, recalling a wounded bird that drops at last.

She was very tired; soon she would have a long rest with no disturbance and no anxiety. Yet when she awoke again, what would there be to do? Her friend gone, she must take up the thread of her old life again. Even then, she reflected with bitter humiliation, her thoughts were selfish; she was ready to plan for her own future. Yet the time of stress was to her—half unconsciously—the soul's opportunity. She did not drift in mere abandonment, and her relaxations were not unconsidered. The solace of an unconditional surrender to grief was denied her.

She had strength, but no consolation from the pride of negation.

When the end came, she stood in dull expectation of an overmastering emotion, strangely delayed. Her excitement was sunken; she was weary. Already the lapses and struggles of life seemed far away—useless, forgotten irrelevancies. Death now seemed rather the concentration of life. Her familiar affection changed to pride and reverence before the majesty of his face. Never had his features seemed more noble; never had the spiritual communion between her and her lover seemed more real. Yet, as she turned from the bed to look round the room, prompted by an instinct that made her grasp at well-known and material things, she felt suddenly the sharpness of loss. What she saw existed for him no longer; no more they met here in a common knowledge, a common intimacy; the room and its contents had lost half their meaning.

The room oppressed her. She turned to the window for relief, and looked out on the well-known scene. The bareness of winter was hardly touched yet by the beginnings of spring. The rain had cleared away, leaving a sky of fresh delight, the earth glistening in the sun. Her

emotions were at the high pitch of sensitiveness. Sun and earth seemed full of a promise that transcended her own obscure and trivial cares ; and her heart rose on a wave of exultation. So long as the sun rose she was not without a friend, and the earth would give her rest at last.

She found Mrs. Brayshaw already dressed for departure, and hesitated, doubtful of her inclination no less than of her duty.

Mrs. Brayshaw spoke: "You will forgive me."

"I don't blame you."

"Oh ! blame and then forgive ; don't stand aloof."

"Forgive, forgive—I'm tired of forgiving. I owe myself a little self-indulgence."

"I might claim my right now ; I'm weary, miserable, sick, I hate everyone but you—or do I hate you most ? No—myself, myself most."

"Oh ! stay—stay here."

"Not now. I shall come again."

"Come again," said Ursula listlessly. It sounded like an echo.

But she turned to her again.

"What shall you do ? What's your future ? your outlook ?"

"Why do you ask that ?"

“Curiosity, I suppose; curiosity.”

“Future? I’ve no future. I live from hour to hour—from day to day.”

“You’ve no philosophy—no relief? No faith?”

“None.”

“How do you live?”

“A kind of persistence, I suppose.”

“I thought I was miserable.”

“You don’t know what misery is.”

“Will you come here and live with me?”

“Oh! I detest your charity. You stiffen again into the impeccable, magnanimous woman. Let us be jealous—let us be angry—let us warm our blood. I could love you—or hate you—if you would but be human. You’re as cold as a stone. Jealousy! You have cause enough.”

“It’s such an infinitely small matter.”

“But what are the great ones? What are the great ones?”

When Mrs. Brayshaw had gone, Ursula sat for a long time gazing through the latticed window into the sunny garden. Betsy’s entrance disturbed her, and she said:—

“Don’t pull down the blinds here, Betsy. Does it seem wrong to you? Let us have what sunlight we may.”

“If you think it right, it must be right, Miss.”

“Why, the crocuses are out!”

“I put some in your room yesterday, Miss.”

“And Mr. Taylor has had his shutters painted.”

Betsy refrained from the speech that was upon her lips.

“But what an ugly brown. I must get him to alter that.”

“I’m sure he will, Miss.”

“Oh! Betsy, I want everything to be beautiful, and how thankful I am that it’s the spring. And see what a heap of books is waiting for me now—what a weary heap of books. I must begin on them to-morrow.”

THE END



